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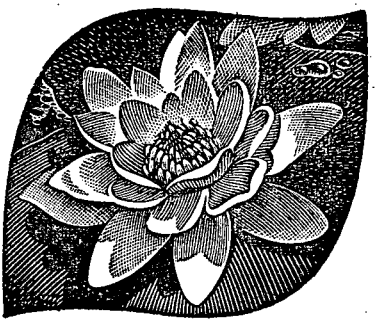

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ARGOSY

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We wish to offer our sincere apologies to Mr. Laurie Lee and Messrs. John Lehmann Ltd. for the publication in our September issue of a poem of Mr. Lee's under the title of *September Tide* without the usual acknowledgements. This poem appears in *The Bloom of Candles*, published by Messrs. John Lehmann, under its correct title *Day of These Days*, and consists there of nine verses, the sixth of which we left out, unfortunately without authorization.

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Carol

OVER the rim of the world the Ship of the world
This night to harbour comes, to rest, to rest.
Look, for the sails on the horizon fill
With the following winds, and cresting them, the Star
Like a grain of quartz, a crystal of silent frost.

Come to the harbour, come to the quiet quays
Where the hushing waves rock, as a woman singing
Cradles a Child, and the ship forgets the sea,
And the sails are furled, and the storms are yet to come.
Only, washed by the bitter-sweet winter moon

Curled like the rind of a fruit in the dark-blue sky
A treasure lies. O traveller, take this gold;
This night it is yours; bend low, and under this spar
Whose shadow falls as a Cross on the wharf of snow,
Stoop to gather your ransom and your prize,

With the Shepherds, the Kings, and these bright legions, crowned,
Through the blue air in quires of gold descending.
And see, dandled upon a woman's breast
In the ship of the world a Golden Child is lying,
Traveller, this night, and every night, your King.

MARGARET STANLEY-WRENCH

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HURRICANE

Odd, you might say, almost uncanny . . .

by J. MATTHEWMAN

WHEN Hennessey saw the ginger cat walk primly up the gangway and disappear down the hatchway to the boiler room, he knew Mendoza was on board, and cursed his luck.

For ten—twelve—fifteen—a thousand years, it seemed, they had dogged one another's footsteps; Hennessey, Mendoza and the ginger cat. Mendoza said the cat belonged to him, but since he provided it with neither food, shelter nor affection, the relationship would appear to be the reverse. The manner in which the two disported themselves while ashore, was apparent for two reasons. For three days after signing on a new voyage, Mendoza was incapacitated by the effects of strong drink, while the ginger cat retired at once to the boiler room for her accouchement, and in due course presented the ship's company with a clutch of squirming, fat-bellied kittens.

The three of them had met in the days when Mendoza was a stoker aboard a coaling vessel on the Gold Coast and Hennessey was a young apprentice. There had been a ginger cat in those days. Mendoza swore it was the same one, but he was a dumb, feckless creature given to dark and dangerous moods and the cat had become part of the legend which grew with the years. Perhaps she had a kitten which grew up and followed Mendoza about in the same curious, unloving, protective ritual.

Mendoza was still a stoker but Hennessey was now a First Mate, and there was still a ginger cat tripping primly up the gangway with her belly swollen to unlovely proportions.

The *Alcestis* was a single-screw turbine steamer of about 8,000 tons and she was carrying a mixed cargo of skins and spices and drums of raw alcohol. She was bound for the East by way of the North Atlantic, hugging the coast of North America until she encountered the Gulf Stream, then down between the Islands, through the Windward Passage to the Panama Canal, filling up her hatches with cargo as she went.

Hennessey had signed on as First Mate at the start of the voyage in Liverpool and he was a happy and contented man until Mendoza boarded the ship in place of a sick stoker.

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From the moment he came aboard, Hennessey noticed a certain uneasiness spreading throughout the ship. Captain Bird was not a nervous man by nature. Like Hennessey, he had spent too many years at sea to be really scared by superstition or an old wives' tale. They were God-fearing men and believed in the solidarity of their ships and the courage and skill of their crews. To a casual observer, the Captain's fussiness might have seemed nothing more than a characteristic anxiety for the safe delivery of his cargo; but Hennessey had sailed with more men than he cared to remember and he read the signs aright.

He was standing beside the Captain one evening as the *Alcestis* cut a smooth passage through the Caribbean when Captain Bird said, " Damn funny about that Mendoza chap coming aboard. I suppose you didn't—"

" Look," Hennessey said deliberately, his hands unconsciously tightening on the rail, " Mendoza is a half-witted, evil-thinking slob, and if there's one thing I hate more than him, it's his red-eyed devil of a cat. If it were possible to put ten thousand miles between us, I'd go to considerable trouble to do so."

" Still—you must admit it's odd, the way he seems to turn up every time you sign on a new ship," the Captain persisted.

" It's more than odd, it's diabolical," Hennessey replied. ' I've tried talking to him, bribing him, threatening. The man's a loon. You can't reason with a loon. I've given up trying."

"And it doesn't worry you, this rumour about Mendoza bringing bad luck, being a sort of evil genius ? "

" Of course not. The man's crazy, I tell you. He's incapable of two consecutive thoughts."

Captain Bird moved away, uneasily, as if he had left the important question unasked and Hennessey looked down into a patch of phosphorescent water, uncomfortably aware that he had spoken only half the truth.

It was a perfect night. The phosphorus lit the water with a strange glow like a lot of crystal stars exploding beneath the surface in a flurry of scintillating bubbles. Everything that moved in the water was sheathed with the same luminous glow, the dolphins passing and re-passing one another in graceful arcs and the ship's wake frothing out behind like a taffeta bustle.

The next day there was a slight breeze which stiffened towards evening, and the Captain ordered a general overhaul and tightening of hatches and loose gear.

" Funny for the old man to be so queasy about a bit of a breeze," thought Hennessey. And as if he had read his thoughts the Captain said, behind him, " Never can tell in this latitude. The hurricane season is over, of course, but I've known it blow a squall at this

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time of the year. Can't be too careful," and he laughed, nervously.

Hennessey hadn't seen Mendoza since he came aboard but he could feel the man's presence like a sinister shadow lurking at his back, vanishing when he turned around. He hadn't seen the cat, either, until that morning, when it deigned to come on deck and sat washing its moth-eaten fur on the Number One hatch. Hennessey liked cats and put out his hand to stroke it, but the cat turned on him with such a look of hate and venom that he instinctively drew back. They eyed one another for a second, as if testing weapons, then the cat spat viciously and springing off the hatch, disappeared down to the boiler room again. " Wonder where she's hidden her kittens this time," he thought, and ran into Captain Bird coming out of the wheelhouse.

" Gale's increasing," Bird said.

" Maybe it'll blow itself out by morning," Hennessey replied, without conviction. He had a queer feeling that the Captain in some way held him responsible for the unexpected bad weather.

It wasn't possible that the old story about Mendoza being his evil genius was making the Captain anxious. What did Bird expect him to do about it ? Throw Mendoza overboard as if he'd been a Jonah and his cat with him ? It was unreasonable.

There was no love lost between them, it was true. Mendoza hated Hennessey with the blind, frustration of a cur for its master and Hennessey despised and detested Mendoza for failing to rise above his station, to improve his condition or to benefit himself in even the most elementary way from the proceeds of his various voyages. But he wasn't *afraid* of him. Not yet, at any rate.

They were facing the last stretch of empty water before reaching Colon and the entrance to the Canal, a matter of forty eight hours or so, when the sea changed to an angry black and the *Alcestis* began groaning and creaking as the cargo strained on its fastenings in the holds.

The barometer continued to fall and it was now evident that they were entering the first quadrant of a hurricane. The odd thing was that they could find no corroboration for this particular storm. The radio gave back a stream of identical weather reports. Calm, steady and fair with barometer set. They must accept it for what it was, a freak storm.

Captain Bird ordered the ship to heave-to. It would only be a matter of hours before they reached the vortex of the hurricane and the ship was too deep in the water with cargo to try and ride it out. All the crew had experienced hurricanes before and there was nothing particularly odd about this one except its unexpected appearance. However, the sense of uneasiness quickly spread and

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there were mutterings amongst the Lascar crew and a constrained silence in the officers' quarters.

Hennessey felt somehow, guilty, and went on deck to get away from them. As he stepped out from the wheelhouse the wind blew his eyes shut and it was as much as he could do to stand up straight against the pressure. Walking round the deck was like trying to climb a table at the vertical and turning aft was like sliding down an amusement chute. The tenor shrieking of the wind had given place to a bass roar and the *Alcestis* shuddered and bucked in an effort to hold her own against the sucking water and the tearing wind.

Taking shelter beneath a coaming, Hennessey looked out across the boiling ocean as if at another world. The water plunged and swooped and spun, rearing up in a tower of rocking green to topple and fall upon the ship, scattering spray on the tarpaulins like atomized splinters. It was like ten devils fighting one another on the ocean bed, hurling the water at one another, pressing it down, pulling it apart, flinging it over their heads.

Hennessey had looked at storms before, but this one was different. There was something uncanny, evil, threatening about it. He felt a stab of unaccustomed fear and struggled back to the comparative warmth of the wheelhouse and the comforting sound of a human voice. On the way, he remarked the Captain's forethought in securing the hatches; it would have been impossible now.

In the wheelhouse it was like being thrown in a wooden barrel at a stone wall. The noise was deafening. Words became lost in the battering of the waves against the ship's side. Movement was almost impossible as the ship pointed her nose into the water and went deeper and deeper until it seemed as if her bowels would be torn from her, then reared up with a sickening action that threatened to split her decks asunder.

Bird shouted into Hennessey's ear. " The engines can't stand much more of this. If we don't hit the centre of the hurricane pretty soon, we'll be a total loss."

Hennessey nodded and, interpreting this to mean he was to signal for dead-slow, took up the speaking tube but found it unanswered.

" Radio's been useless too for fifteen minutes," the Captain bellowed. " We've signalled distress but we can't get a reply."

Hennessey nodded and shouted back that he was going to investigate the damage but before he could move the door was flung open and a seaman entered, his face like chalk.

" Leak in the stokehold ! " he gasped, through tight lips.

" Heaven help us ! Are the men out ? " shouted Bird. The man shook his head.

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Hennessey tried not to think of the effect of steam heated to six hundred degrees and released at a pressure of two hundred pounds to the square inch on human flesh.

Things began to happen quickly after that. The helmsman shouted and pointed to the compass which was veering round at an alarming angle. At the same time the pumps stopped working, the fans ceased to function and the lights went out. The steering gear jammed and the engines slowed down and stopped.

As the wind began to turn the ship, the cargo shifted in the holds, rolled to one side and the sea and sky became merged, then disappeared altogether as the ship reeled drunkenly. At a moment when the crew were saying their prayers and preparing to jump, the *Alcestis* righted herself as the cargo rolled over to the other side.

How long could they keep that up, Hennessey wondered. Without her steam power, without her turbines, the *Alcestis* was a useless hulk at the mercy of the wind and water. Her heart had stopped and she was dead. Suddenly, he felt he could bear the unspoken reproach from the others no longer and stumbled to the door, tearing it open and fighting his way on deck again.

The darkness of night was now added to the darkness of the storm. It was a tangible, cumbersome thing. You could push it aside with your shoulders to make room for your body to follow. Hennessey swallowed his breath and tasted oil and soot from the funnel.

The wind was sucking the last spasm of life from the stokehold. Cinders burnt his hands and he realized that part of the deck was on fire. There had been an explosion somewhere, in the boiler room or the hold where the alcohol was stored. The spray descending on the ship in solid masses of water sent the fire flying in all directions, spitting and sizzling and disappearing into the night. It was hell let loose.

Hennessey felt his way down to the saloon which was already a shambles of broken furniture and smashed crockery and glass. He wedged himself in behind an upturned table and tried not to think.

The following morning, the *Alcestis* entered the centre of the hurricane. Hennessey, sick and battered and dizzy, dragged himself to his feet and climbed back on deck. The sight that met his eyes was like a scene from the Inferno.

The deck, the handrails, the hatches, every conceivable space, in fact, was covered with birds. Birds of all descriptions, swallows, herons, even cranes. Some of them were stuck in the oil and tar pouring over the deck from the gaping hole where the funnel had been. As the ship lurched downwards into the ocean, some of

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them fell off, silently, helplessly, all resistance gone from their tired wings.

Hennessey walked to the rail and found himself treading on birds, too weary to move. The soft crunch of their small bodies under his boot made him feel sick again. He leaned on the rail and looked down at the water. In the comparative calm he could see sharks circling the ship, waiting patiently. It was so quiet, it hurt, like pressure suddenly released from the ear drums.

The ship was ominously quiet. Where was the crew? Why wasn't someone clearing up the mess and repairing the damage? Then he noticed that the lifeboats were gone. Not torn away or damaged, but gone. Slowly the truth dawned on him. They'd left, deserted, abandoned ship. God knows they'd not much of a chance, but they'd preferred that to staying on board with a Jonah and his bad luck. And suddenly Hennessey was afraid, terribly afraid. He was on board a floating hell-ship with the hurricane only half done and somewhere—Mendoza and the ginger cat were waiting—for what?

He tried to reduce things to their proper perspective, to find a logical explanation for things that seemed to have their origin in supernatural motives; and at last he was able to isolate himself from the fiendish activities of sea and storm and think clearly. If the *Alcestis* had weathered the hurricane so far there was still a chance she might outride it and stay afloat. If one of the original distress signals had got through there would be a rescue ship waiting on the fringes of the storm to come to her aid. If he could hold out till then.

It became a question of survival. Good. That was something he understood. Something to lend purpose and energy to his limbs and mind. He went in search of food.

Down in the saloon he found a bottle of ginger ale and a tin of biscuits miraculously intact. Not the best diet for a sick and empty stomach, but better than nothing. He cracked the bottle open on a chair leg and was holding it to his lips when he felt a movement behind him and without turning knew it was Mendoza.

The man stood in a wrecked doorway. He was naked to the waist, dripping with sweat and oil, and blood ran down his face and body in dark rivulets and was absorbed in the filthy cloth tied round his trousers for a belt. He slobbered and his eyes had a wild, animal ferocity about them. He held a large shovel in his hands.

They stared at one another a moment. Hennessey knew it was useless to reason with him, the man was quite insane. He realized he was still holding the ginger ale bottle with the liquid running down the sides and over his hand. Mendoza grunted and moved

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forward; his hands clasping and unclasping the shovel with a maddening persistence. One of them was going to get hurt, that was clear.

Hennessey moved sideways, playing for time. Mendoza quickened his pace and raised the shovel a little. Hennessey backing against the piled up debris, tripped, and righting himself was in time to see Mendoza straighten and raise the shovel high above his head. Hennessey aimed the bottle at Mendoza's face and at that moment the *Alcestis* rolled.

The next thing Hennessey knew he was lying on the floor with Mendoza clawing his face and throat. Over and over they rolled, crashing into the furniture, splintering glass and wrapping themselves in the hangings. Hennessey tasted blood and his cheek smarted from Mendoza's fingernails. The noise of the storm was beginning to swallow the sound of their laboured breathing. It was difficult to get hold of anything with the ship rearing and plunging. Pretty soon one of them was going to take advantage of an upright position to get in a crippling blow.

Flung to the ground, Hennessey saw Mendoza's ugly face leering above him. Saliva dripped on to his face from the slavering mouth. The expression was more devil than human. Hennessey knew a stab of fear again and then he was fighting for his life with Mendoza beating his head against the floor, pressing down on his stomach with his knees.

A sudden lurch of the ship gave him the advantage he needed and now he had his hands round Mendoza's windpipe and he was squeezing and squeezing with all the strength of his broad, blood-stained hands. In a moment or two he dropped the lifeless body on the floor and staggering to the hatchway, climbed up on deck.

The wind in the second half seemed even more fierce. Again and again it snatched the *Alcestis* from a watery grave as the greedy tentacles of the ocean sucked her down and down. The wheelhouse crumpled like a pack of cards and the hatches lifted up and blew past like driftwood on a windy beach. The birds had all gone, brushed off by an invisible hand.

Hennessey found a stout piece of Manilla rope and belayed himself to the first stationary object he could find. If he had to die he would do so on deck amidst the understandable menace of storm and sea. Not for all the gold in the world would he go willingly to the saloon again to gaze upon the countenance of his hateful victim.

The storm blew itself out and passed on leaving the *Alcestis* a floating wreck on the ocean surface. She moved gently up and down on the calm water like a cradle rocked by an unseen hand.

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Hennessey untied the rope and sank down where he was, too exhausted and beaten to care what became of him. Presently the ginger cat emerged from the hatch and approached him. It ran to and fro in anxious darting movements, beseeching him to notice her. Hennessey struck out at it with his boot and the cat leaped back and regarded Hennessey with hurt surprise. After a while it renewed its darting movements.

Hennessey got up, slowly, and followed it down to the boiler room where it jumped on a pile of twisted metal and looked at him. Hennessey inserted his hand into a small space at the foot of the pile and found a pool of fresh water made by the evaporating steam. He pressed it to his cracked lips gratefully. He put his hand further into the hole and encountered something warm and soft and moving. He looked up for the cat but she had gone.

Hennessey never saw her again. He withdrew his hand and opened it. A small ball of yellow fur uncurled itself and sat up, blinking in the sudden light. There was only one kitten.

As Hennessey felt its tiny body between his finger and thumb, a feeling of compassion overcame him. It was the only living thing, besides himself, aboard that hell-ship, and it was so small and young and defenceless.

The irony of the situation struck him forcibly. It was as if he had seen himself in a mirror. A great, bearded giant of a man, hair upstanding, clothes stained with oil and salt and blood, lips swollen and eyes sunken—and in his hand the tiny yellow kitten, all soft, clean fur, damp from its mother's tongue.

He prodded it gently with his finger and it sat up and spat at him. He laughed, then, a loud, satisfying sound that echoed through the empty ship like a bugle call over a battlefield. And at that moment he heard the voices of the boarding party "hallo-ing" him from above.

* * *

VERSATILE

After the world-famous violinist, Fritz Kreisler, had given an impressive display of card tricks at a party, one of the guests came up to him and said: "I wonder if you would care to perform at a party I am giving."

Kreisler told the man to make arrangements with his agent. The contract was signed and Kreisler arrived at the party. His host, entering the room, saw him take out his violin.

"Imagine that! So you play the violin, too, Mr. Kreisler!" he said patronizingly.

Magazine Digest

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THE WINDFALL

"That's all I want," she said, "*all*, and I want it in a hurry!"

by ERSKINE CALDWELL

WHEN Waldo Murdock, whose trade, when he felt like working at it, was carpentry, came into the unexpected inheritance, there had been no commotion in Bridgeton to equal it since the time when, eleven years before, one of the Perkins brothers, with no more forewarning than a stroke of summer lightning, ran away in broad daylight with the resident minister's second wife.

As for the townspeople, none of them, not even Aunt Susie Shook, who told fortunes by reading tea leaves, or coffee grounds if necessary, had ever had the remotest idea that anything in the nature of sudden wealth would fall into Waldo Murdock's scrawny lap. But, of course, people were quick to say that if he had not been sitting down, as usual, instead of being up and doing, there would have been no lap of his for it to fall into; and certainly Waldo himself, even though he daydreamed about almost everything else under the sun, had never entertained such a far-fetched thought in his mind.

Waldo did not even know he had a brother in Australia and, even if he had known it, he would never have imagined that he would be remembered in a Will. From Bangor to Burlington, all the Murdocks, especially the home-owning branch of the family, were known throughout the entire region north of Boston for their trait, which relatives-by-marriage and other outsiders called cussedness, of not acknowledging kinship with one another. And as it was, it was all Waldo could do to force himself, after having cast aside pride of long standing, publicly to admit blood relationship with another Murdock, even if he had lived in Australia, long enough to go to the bank in Waterville and cash the cheque the lawyer from Portland had handed him.

"Pay no mind to what the people say," he told the clerk in the bank. "There may be others in the State of Maine bearing the name of Murdock, but there's not a single drop of mingling blood that I would own to. I'd sooner claim kinship with my old black cow than I would with a so-called Murdock."

Dessie, Waldo's wife, was, at the beginning, the most level

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headed of all. She maintained her mental balance, if only at the start, much better than Waldo and some of the townspeople. Dessie, although afterwards she regretted not having gone along, even remained at home and tended the house chores while Waldo was away in Waterville cashing the cheque. There was only one thing she did out of the ordinary that forenoon, and that was to make Justine, the hired girl, air the parlour and shake out the rugs, even if it were not Saturday.

During all that time the neighbours were ringing her up on the 'phone and asking what she was going to do with all that money, but that, too, in the beginning, failed to veer the even measure of her thoughts.

" When the cheque is cashed, if it's not worthless, and it'll be a wonder if it's not, there'll be ample time at hand for me to go out of my way to think about it," she told them. " Right now, and likely forever after, it's nothing but a scrawl and a promise on a slip of paper."

Dessie went back to work with her lips a little tighter each time she finished talking to one of the neighbours on the 'phone. She was not exactly worried, she told Justine, but she was feeling impatient. Waldo failed to come home at the noon hour for dinner, and it was not long after that before she, like everybody else in Bridgeton who was working himself into a frenzy over Waldo's sudden windfall, began thinking of the things that could be done with the money.

Late that afternoon Waldo drove into the yard and left the car standing there instead of putting it away in the shed where it belonged.

Justine came running to tell her.

Dessie was so on edge by that time that she jumped several inches off the chair seat when Justine, who was as excited as she by then, ran into the room where she was.

" Mr. Murdock's back ! " Justine cried, twisting her fingers.

" He'd better be ! " Dessie said. " If he hadn't got home when he did, he could have just kept on travelling, for all the concern I'd ever have."

" I believe Mr. Murdock has the real money," Justine said, looking over her shoulder. " He looked like he was feeling good about it when he got out of the car."

Dessie leaped to her feet.

" Go on about your tasks, whatever they be, Justine," said she crossly. " It's none of your money, if there is any, anyway."

Justine went to the kitchen and watched Waldo come along the path to the side door.

Waldo came in, throwing his hat on the table. He looked at

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Dessie for a moment, cocking his head a little to one side. His coat pocket sagged heavily.

Neither Dessie nor Waldo spoke for a while.

Presently Dessie walked up to him and held out her hand.

" I think I'll take charge for the time being, Waldo," she said stiffly. " Hand it over."

Waldo reached into his coat pocket, drawing out a mostly empty bottle and handed it to her. She stepped back, looking at it severely. Then, without a word, she grabbed the bottle by the neck and slung it with all her might across the room. It struck the wall, shattering into dozens of pieces.

" I might have known it, and I would have, if I had only had the sense God has given most people ! " she said, raising her voice. " I've got only myself to blame ! "

Waldo reached for a chair.

" Now, there's no cause for a human to take on so, Dessie," he said. " Everything turned out, from here to there and back again, like it was made to order."

He reached into his trouser pocket and drew out a bulging roll of banknotes. They were tied tightly round the centre with a piece of heavy twine. Dessie forgot her anger the instant she saw the money. The scowling lines on her face disappeared completely while she watched Waldo bounce the roll up and down in his hand.

" All I've got to say," she began, " is that I never thought I'd live to breathe the air of the day when a deceasing Murdock would have the decency to do the honourable thing with his money, even if he couldn't find means of taking it along with him when he went, which would be a wonder if he didn't try to do, and he probably did, anyway."

Waldo leaned back and let her talk to her heart's content. He felt so good himself that he wanted her to have a good time, too. He let her speak what came to mind without uttering a single grumble.

" Have you any more blood relations that we've neglected to remind ourselves of, Waldo ? " she asked, leaning towards him. " It seems to me that I recall your second cousin in Skowhegan saying once some years ago that a Murdock went to California at the end of the Spanish-American War and prospected for gold. It might be that he struck it rich out there, which a lot of people did, so I've read, if reading can be believed. If we'd been more particular about your blood relations in the past, we wouldn't have to sit here now and rack our brains trying to call them to mind at a time like this."

" I have no blood relations of the name of Murdock," Waldo said firmly.

Dessie drew a deep breath and looked longingly at the large roll

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of banknotes bouncing up and down in her husband's hand. Suddenly she leaned forward and grasped the roll desperately. Waldo snatched it from her.

"I think we ought to start making plans," she said.

"This is Murdock money, woman," he said quickly. "A Murdock made it, and a Murdock shall spend it."

Dessie sat up decisively.

"Well, anyway, we'll be sensible," she said calmly. "We won't throw it away on trifles like a lot of people would that I could mention, if I had a mind to."

"I've got it all settled, Dessie," Waldo told her, smiling as a kindly feeling came over him. "We can afford to have a good time now at our age. Maybe we won't be lingering here much longer, which would be a shame if we hadn't taken full advantage of it by the time we went. Wouldn't be no sense in hoarding it only to have to pass it along to somebody else after we are gone."

Dessie nodded approvingly, her spirits rising again.

"I've always wanted a fur coat, Waldo," she said, her face bright with hope.

Dessie did not sleep a single wink that night. For an hour after they had gone to bed, she lay silently tense, listening. Waldo did not stir. He lay on his back listening to Dessie's laboured breathing.

Just before midnight Dessie got up as quietly as she possibly could and tiptoed to the foot of the bed where Waldo had laid his trousers over the back of a chair. It was dark in the room with the curtains drawn, and she took care in feeling her way to the chair. She was trembling nervously when she touched it, and the jerking of her breath had started a pain in her chest. Without losing any more time she slid her hand into the pocket.

"Get your hand out of my trouser pocket, Dessie," Waldo said, rising up in bed. "Leave that money be."

Dessie dropped the trousers without having touched the money, and went back to bed without a word. Neither of them spoke as she lay down again and tried to make herself as comfortable as possible for the remainder of the night. After that both of them lay staring into the blackness of the room.

Just as dawn was beginning to show the first signs of breaking, Dessie slid carefully from the bed and crawled on her hands and knees towards the chair. As she was rising up to reach the pocket, Waldo sat up erectly.

"Don't want to have to mention it again about you putting your hand in my trouser pocket," he said. "Leave that money be, Dessie."

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Dessie dropped the trousers like a hot brick and went to the window. She stood there watching a red dawn break in the east. After a while she began dressing, and as she was leaving the room she heard Justine starting a fire in the kitchen stove.

While she and Justine were preparing breakfast, she began to realize how uneasy she really was about the money. She had spent a sleepless night worrying over the wealth, and she was afraid she would not get a chance to spend a single penny of it herself.

" Mrs. Murdock," Justine said, coming and standing beside her, " Carl and I could get married right away if we had the money for the furniture."

" Let Carl Friend make his own money," Dessie said sharply, turning on the girl. " Me and my husband have worked hard all our lives for what we possess. It won't hurt Carl Friend to do the same for you, if he wants a family."

" I couldn't sleep much last night for staying awake wondering if you and Mr. Murdock wouldn't want help me out," Justine said persistently. " Especially because I've worked here for you six years without asking favours, and I didn't think you'd miss a little of all that big inheritance from Australia."

" Mind your own business, Justine ! " she said sharply. " Besides, Carl Friend can get the money from his own family if he wants to furnish a house for you."

" They won't help any, Mrs. Murdock," Justine said sadly. " And Carl and I don't want to have to wait and wait and wait."

" You don't have to hurry the marriage for any reason, do you ? " Dessie asked suspiciously.

Justine looked at her for several moments, her thoughts racing through her mind.

" Not exactly," she admitted at last.

" Well, then," Dessie said, turning away, " in that case, you can afford to wait."

In turning abruptly she almost walked headlong into Waldo. He had come into the kitchen and was going towards the pantry. After Dessie had stepped out of the way, she watched him go into the pantry and pick up several tins off the shelf. He found an empty coffee tin and left, going through the kitchen and out of the door without a word being spoken. Dessie watched him leave, wondering what he was about to do.

She went to the window and watched as he walked to the tool shed and came out a moment later carrying a spade. With the coffee tin in one hand and the spade over his shoulder, he disappeared out of sight behind the barn.

It was not until almost ten minutes had passed that Dessie realized what Waldo was doing behind the barn.

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Just as she was opening the door to run out there and observe him from the corner of the barn, Waldo walked into view. He came towards the house, carrying the spade but not the coffee tin. Dessie's heart sank. He had buried the tin, and the money with it, and she had failed to get out there in time to see where the wealth had been hidden. She walked back into the kitchen and placed breakfast on the table.

Waldo came in a few minutes later, washed his hands at the pump, and sat down at his place. He began eating as though nothing out of the ordinary had taken place behind the big barn. Neither she nor Waldo had anything to say to each other during the whole twenty minutes they were at the table. When he finished eating, he got up and put on his hat.

" I've some affairs to attend to in the village," he said shortly. " I'll be away for the afternoon, the whole of it."

Dessie nodded. She had to grip her hands tightly in order to hide her impatience. She waited until Waldo had got into the car and driven over the hill out of sight, and then she grabbed Justine by the arm and pulled her through the door. Pushing Justine ahead, Dessie ran as fast as she could to the tool shed, where she quickly snatched up two spades, and then hurried towards the back of the barn.

She set Justine to digging right away, while she looked the ground over carefully, hoping to find evidence of a freshly covered hole. She searched for nearly half an hour without finding a single trace of the hole she was positive Waldo had dug, and after that she went to work, digging methodically.

After several hours Justine slumped to the ground, completely exhausted. Dessie was tired, too, and the blisters on her hands made digging so painful that she could hardly bear to hold the spade. But she forced herself to keep on, allowing Justine to rest a few minutes.

" Get up and dig, Justine," she called breathlessly, not being able to bear seeing her idle any longer.

Justine crawled to her feet and tried to push the blade of the spade into the stony earth. She wanted to beg Dessie to let her rest some more, but when she glanced up and saw Dessie's closely clamped lips, she knew it would be useless to ask.

Dessie stopped for a moment to ease her back. When her eyes were raised from the ground, she saw Fred Paxton leaning over the stone wall beside the road a hundred feet away.

" Going fishing, Dessie ? " he called. " See you're digging fishing worms."

Dessie thrust her hand against the small of her aching back and straightened up a little more.

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" Thought I might," she said slowly. " It's been a long time since I went."

" Now that you and Waldo have all that money," Fred said, " you and he can afford to spend all your time doing nothing but fish, if you have a mind to."

" Maybe," she said, tightening her lips.

The mere mention of the money inflamed her thoughts until she could not see clearly. She bent over the spade, thrusting the blade into the rough, stony ground with all her might. She kept doggedly at it until she was certain Fred had walked out of sight over the hill.

Later she sent Justine to the kitchen for some bread and potatoes left over from breakfast, and when Justine returned Dessie sat down in the shade of the barn and ate hurriedly.

" While I was in the house, Mr. Murdock 'phoned and said he wouldn't be back this afternoon," Justine said. " He told me to tell you he would be away all evening, too."

Dessie leaped to her feet.

" Why didn't you tell me right away when you came back a minute ago ? " she said angrily.

Justine glanced at the stony ground.

" We're not going to dig out here the whole afternoon, too, are we, Mrs. Murdock ? " she enquired pleadingly. " My hands are raw with blisters, and—"

" Never mind that," Dessie said firmly. " We are going to dig this afternoon, the whole of it ! "

" But, Mrs. Murdock—"

" Shut up, Justine, and do as you are told ! "

When Dessie fell on the bed at dusk that evening, she had never before in all her life felt so thoroughly miserable. Not only had she spent the entire day digging in the stony ground behind the barn, but, moreover, she had not been able to find the coffee tin. Her back felt as if she would never be able to use it again.

Once upon the bed, she moved her body carefully, easing herself into a prone position. Justine had gone out earlier in the evening with Carl Friend, and Waldo still had not returned. Dessie felt so tired and lonely that she wanted to cry.

Just as she felt tears coming into her eyes, the 'phone began to ring. She lay motionless, listening to it ring for several minutes, hoping all the while that it would stop so she could begin crying.

The 'phone did not stop, and it sounded as if it never would as long as she lived. She got to her feet, pressing her hands over her ears in order to keep out the sound, and stumbled painfully to the hall. There she sat down in the chair beside the stand and lifted the receiver.

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" Hello," she said unsteadily.

" Is that Waldo Murdock's wife ? " a voice boomed.

" Yes," she answered, wondering who it could be.

" Then you'd better bestir yourself and fetch Waldo home where he belongs before it's too late. This is Charles Mason. Waldo is over here at my place, in the east part of town, annoying my household. I've never in my life seen a man behave like he's doing. I suppose it's public knowledge by now, otherwise I wouldn't be repeating it, that sudden wealth has gone to his head, but that's still no excuse for the way he's behaving."

" What's Waldo doing ? " Dessie asked, shouting impulsively into the 'phone.

" He's persuading Miss Wilson, the schoolteacher who boards at my house, into going away with him. He says he's going to set sail for Australia or somewhere."

" But he can't do that ! " Dessie protested.

" That's what any average, normal, level minded human being would think, too, but I don't know what's going to stop Waldo if you don't come and get him right away, because he's already argued Miss Wilson into going to Boston with him tonight, and starting out again from there first thing in the morning. He's got Miss Wilson believing everything he says, the lies along with the common truth. You'd think she would be on her guard, knowing she's associating with a newly-rich, but she's too far gone now to listen to reason. Waldo pulls out his wealth every few minutes and waves it in front of her, and the sight of that big roll of banknotes acts on her just like chloroform would on an average being. I've done my best to—"

Dessie gripped the 'phone.

" Did you say Waldo has a big roll of money ? " she shouted. " Banknotes tied with a string around the middle ? "

" He surely has, Mrs. Murdock. It's the biggest roll of money I've seen on a man since I don't know when."

Dessie, who had risen from the chair until she was almost erect, sat down, hard.

" Let him be ! " she said coldly. " I don't want part or parcel of him. He had me digging in stony ground all day looking for that money in a coffee tin, and it wasn't there at all. Let the schoolteacher take him. I've had my share, and more, of suffering, and now I'd be comforted to see somebody else have a goodly portion of it. Sudden wealth will show up a man's true nature every time, and I'm glad I found out the true size and shape of Waldo Murdock's nature before I wasted another single day of my life on him."

" You mean you're not going to try to stop Waldo from going away to the other end of the world with Miss Wilson ? "

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" No ! " Dessie said emphatically. " Waldo Murdock has a free hand from now on ! "

She hung up the receiver. A moment later she slumped brokenly in the chair. She called Justine several times before remembering that Justine had gone out with Carl Friend.

After that she hurried into her clothes and went back to the 'phone. She rang up Thornton Blanchard, her lawyer, and told him to come right away. He lived only a few miles distant, and he promised to be there within fifteen minutes.

While waiting for Thornton Blanchard, Dessie paced up and down the hallway, her face grim and determined. Her mind was made up, and she knew the sooner she acted the better she would feel.

After a few more minutes, he drove up to the house and stopped his car in the yard. Dessie held the door open for him, as Thornton Blanchard hurried inside and went directly to the table in the centre of the living room.

" Is there something wrong, Mrs. Murdock ? " he asked anxiously.

" There is now, but it won't be much longer," she said, sitting down at the table, " not after I set right things I should have attended to twenty years ago."

Blanchard sat down and opened his brief-case, slipping out a pad of ruled yellow writing paper and a pencil. He watched Dessie's face, waiting for her to begin.

" Are you ready ? " she asked.

" Yes, Mrs. Murdock," he told her, adjusting the pad on the table.

" I want a divorce," she said quickly, " and I want it in a hurry. How soon can I get it, or do I have to go and find myself a better lawyer ? "

Blanchard sat up.

" Joking aside, Mrs. Murdock, right after you and your husband inherited all that wealth, you want a divorce ? " he asked, unbelievingly.

" That's what I said."

" But why ? "

" Never mind my reasons," she answered. " When I go to the store and ask for a pound of sugar, I don't have to tell the grocer my reasons for wanting it, do I ? "

" No, but—"

" Then go ahead and get me my divorce."

Blanchard fingered the writing pad nervously. After several moments he shook himself, and glanced across the table at Dessie.

" Have you any grounds, Mrs. Murdock ? " he enquired, cautiously.

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" Of course, I've got grounds. I've got all the grounds needed, and a plentiful supply to spare."

" What are to be the grounds on which the suit is to be based, Mrs. Murdock ? " he asked, bending over the pad and gripping the pencil tightly.

" Cussedness," she said, leaning back.

Blanchard looked up.

" That's what I said," she nodded. " Cussedness ! "

" The judge that hears this suit might not—"

" I don't care what the judge thinks," she retorted. " It's my divorce, and I'll have grounds of my own choosing whether the judge likes them or not."

Blanchard tapped the pencil on the table several times, his mind deep in thought.

" As your attorney, Mrs. Murdock," he said finally, " would you mind telling me in confidence on just what grounds you do base your contention ? "

" Waldo Murdock tricked me," she said angrily, relieved to have an opportunity to talk about her troubles. " He went and made as if to bury the inheritance in a coffee tin behind the barn, but didn't, and then went off and stayed from home all day while I broke my neck, and Justine's too, digging in stony ground for it."

Blanchard drew the palm of his right hand slowly over his face. He leaned back after that and gazed professionally at the ceiling. He was doing his best to keep from saying, on the spur of the moment, anything of a rash nature.

" And I want alimony, too," Dessie spoke up. " I want all of it."

Blanchard sat up.

" What do you mean by all of it ? "

" All the inheritance, of course," she replied.

Blanchard was silent for some time. He looked down at the pad, studying the texture of the paper minutely. After a while he looked up at Dessie, fortifying himself with several deep breaths.

" It's going to be difficult, if not impossible," he said gravely. " Downright difficult, Mrs. Murdock."

" That's your job," Dessie told him. " I've worked hard for my living, too."

Blanchard expelled the breath from his lungs and took a fresh start.

" For one thing, Mrs. Murdock, we have no community property law in this state." He leaned back, rolling the pencil between the palms of his hands. " Naturally, that rules out automatically any possibility of a legal division of Waldo's wealth, whatever it may amount to. But let me put it another way. I'll review briefly the background of the whole matter.

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" A wife is subject, more or less, to the will of the husband, all things being equal, of course. However, the marriage contract also subjects the husband to the will of the wife, placing the shoe on the other foot, so to speak. Now we arrive at the conclusion that the two members of the partnership are each and individually subject to the will of the other. But, and let me speak frankly, in our present society, it is the wife's own responsibility to devise, instate, and employ methods, means, and opportunities for enticement that will cause her spouse to desire of his own free will and accord to bestow, shall we say, a single largesse, or, as the case often is, continuing largesses, upon her while united in wedlock. Now, as you no doubt realize, Mrs. Murdock, the average wife, to put it bluntly, by showering her favours upon her spouse obtains, in most instances, a bountiful portion of his goods, chattels, and wealth, in some cases benefits that, judged by worldly standards, are far out of proportion to the value . . ."

" No ! " Dessie said emphatically.

Blanchard cleared his throat and bit his underlip.

" It might be best, in the long run, to let the presiding judge set the sum you might obtain from your present husband," he said wearily. " I'm afraid I won't be of much help in that connection. However, I can proceed with filing the divorce papers, and the matter of alimony can be taken up in due course."

" When can I see the judge about getting the money ? " Dessie asked. " Tomorrow morning ? "

" I'm afraid not," he said, shaking his head. " Your suit couldn't possibly come up for trial until the next term of court, next autumn."

" Next autumn ! " Dessie cried.

Blanchard nodded.

" You mean wait all that time ! " she cried excitedly. " Why ! Waldo Murdock will have every penny of the wealth spent long before then. There wouldn't be anything left for me to sue for ! "

" Well," Blanchard said, shaking his head, " I don't know what can be done, then. The terms of court are set by statute."

The side door burst open, and they both turned round to find Waldo standing in the doorway blinking his eyes in the bright light. After adjusting his vision, he walked into the room and went to the empty chair between Dessie and Blanchard.

" How be you, Thornton ? " Waldo said, reaching out and grasping Blanchard's hand. He shook it hard.

" Fair," Blanchard said uneasily. He glanced at Dessie. She was staring at Waldo. " Fair," he said again.

Waldo seated himself.

" Thought for a while today I needed to see you about a little matter, but I changed my mind. There's no need, now."

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"Well, I'm glad you handled the matter without needing any help," Blanchard said, stumbling over the words.

"Decided not to bother handling it," Waldo said, "so I just dropped it."

"That's fine," Blanchard said, wondering.

Waldo made himself comfortable.

"Was trying to figure out a way to have a good time and keep the money, too. Figured it couldn't be done. So, I decided to get rid of it."

Dessie was about to leap from her chair when Waldo reached into his pants pocket and tossed the big roll of banknotes across the table to her. The tightly bound roll of money tumbled into her lap.

For a moment Dessie looked as if she did not know what in the world had happened. Then slowly her eyes began to bulge and she looked down into her lap. She stared at the money dazedly.

"Waldo—" she said, her speech choked.

Tears began to flow down her cheeks, and Waldo squirmed uneasily in his chair. He dropped his head, glancing up at her from beneath his eyebrows every now and then.

"Waldo—" she began again. She could not continue.

Waldo wiped his mouth with the back of his hand.

"Seems a man with no more sense than I've got ought not to be allowed to possess that much wealth," he said, still looking down. "So, I decided there was only one thing to do and that was to get rid of it." He glanced from Dessie to Blanchard. "It makes me feel better to be rid of it, the whole three hundred and fifty pounds."

Her chair falling over backwards as she jumped to her feet, Dessie ran to Waldo. She dropped on her knees beside him and threw her arms around him.

"Waldo—that schoolteacher—"

"The mind was weaker than the eye," he said, glancing up at Blanchard. "The mind was weaker than the eye until she said she wanted me to give her the money to carry."

He looked down admiringly at Dessie.

"Waldo," she said haltingly, "I needed that exercise out behind the barn." She looked up into his face. "It did me a lot of good."

Blanchard pushed back his chair as quietly as possible, gathering up his pad and pencil as he backed away from the table. He had almost reached the door when he was startled to hear somebody singing in the kitchen. He stopped and listened, and by that time Dessie had heard it, too. She raised her head and listened intently. It was Justine singing at the top of her voice. She had never sung like that before, not even during the day.

Dessie got up and went to the kitchen door.

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" Come in here, Justine," she called into the next room.

Justine walked slowly past her and went as far as the table. She stood trembling, fearing she was going to be scolded for singing.

Dessie followed her to the table.

" What did you tell me this morning about not having cause to hurry marriage with Carl Friend, Justine ? " she asked her.

Justine gripped her fingers tightly.

" That's what I said this morning, Mrs. Murdock," she replied after hesitating to answer for several moments. She glanced quickly around the room at Waldo and Blanchard. " But—"

" You can't fool me when I hear such singing as I heard a minute ago, Justine," said Dessie. " I think it would be a good thing if you and Carl Friend went ahead right away and bought that furniture you were speaking to me about this morning."

She handed Justine the roll of banknotes and walked round the table to the chair where Waldo sat. Justine looked at the notes in her hand, gripping them tightly before she could believe in them.

" Thank you, Mrs. Murdock ! " she said, tears beginning to trickle down her cheeks. " How did you know ? "

" Never mind, Justine," Dessie said quickly.

Justine began backing towards the kitchen doorway.

" That money never was intended for us in the first place," Waldo said. " We couldn't have managed it, even if we had had a smart lawyer to help."

Dessie dropped on her knees beside Waldo, throwing her arms around him again. They both turned and looked towards the door where Blanchard was standing. Without a word, he turned, opened the door quickly, and stepped out into the night.

* * *

AQUARIUM

Some fish are minnows,
Some are whales.
People like dimples,
Fish like scales.
Some fish are slim,
And some are round.
They don't get cold,
They don't get drowned,
But every fishwife
Fears for her fish
What we *call mermaids*
And they *call merfish.*

OGDEN NASH

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SING NOWELL

The King of Kings, He is so sweet and small
GERALD BULLETT, *Carol*

I come from Hevin to tell
The best nowellis that ever befell ;
To yow this tythinges trew I bring,
And I will of them say and sing.

This day to yow is borne ane Childe
Of Marie meike and Virgine mylde,
That blissit Barne, bining and kynde,
Sall yow rejoyce baith heart and mynd.

My saull and lyfe, stand up and see
Quha lyes in ane cribe of tree,
Quhat Babe is that, so gude and faire ?
It is Christ, God's sonne and aire.

O God ! that made all creature,
How art thow becum so pure,
That on the hay and stray will lye,
Among the asses, oxin, and kye ?

From "*Ane compendious Booke of Godly and spirituall Sangs*," Edinburgh, 1621

God Rest You Merry

New England was made for Christmas. It has the fir trees for it, it has the high hills and the deep snow . . . Men make lace wherever they walk, and their footprints go handsomely with the featherstitching of the mice and the cuneiforms of the crows. A rabbit out for breakfast leaves at each hop the trefoil sign of the Trinity whenever he touches the clean apocalyptic snow. Old barns sag with white beauty on high. Cold weather puts a sharp edge on everybody's spirits, and even the boy that lugs in the wood for the fire does not mind the work for once. Chimneys smoke for good cheer, and every man or woman who walks the bright world has a halo of breath around his head. There are bells that echo between the mountains, and woods make deep and holy sounds in the wind . . .

The cattle's eyes grow big as the open tie-up door lets in the sudden fragrances of the hay on the towering mows. The mice in the hay eat their very houses away and grow sleek and fat in their chambers of last summer's clover. The mice in the meadows

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keep warm and eat, merry too, under their white roofs of snow. The hens scratch for the corn in the straw, and the hen-pen trembles with their soprano song. Each wind that blows sprinkles a dust of diamonds over the earth, and the colder the gale the snugger the people feel where they hug their fires indoors.

The Christmas goose comes smoking hot from the kitchen with both brown legs up and his wings folded in utter peace at his sides. The smallest boy and the largest aunt grease their chins bright with the fat. Joy runneth over . . .

Then the lights on the house fir-tree come out along with the stars. Carol singers march by twos in the street. The wind goes his rounds, the deer hangs high in the shed, the bins groan with apples, the tawny cider flows. And children go to sleep with dolls clasped in their arms and new-painted sleds that smell like peppermint.

Peace and goodwill lie as deep on the world as the snow.

ROBERT P. TRISTRAM COFFIN, *Christmas in New England*

Waes-Hael!

Waes-hael! in shadowy scene
Lo! Christmas children we:
Drink-hael! behold we lean
At a far Mother's knee;
To dream that thus her bosom smiled,
And learn the lip of Bethlehem's Child.

ROBERT STEPHEN HAWKER, 1803-1875, *King Arthur's Waes-hael*

Holy Night

Now three years before his death it befell that he was minded, at the town of Greccio, to celebrate the memory of the Birth of the Child Jesus, with all the added solemnity that he might, for the kindling of devotion. He . . . made ready a manger, and bade hay, together with an ox and an ass, be brought unto the place. The Brethren were called together, the folk assembled, the wood echoed with their voices, and that august night was made radiant and solemn with many bright lights, and with tuneful and sonorous praises. The man of God, filled with tender love, stood before the manger, bathed in tears, and overflowing with joy . . .

A certain knight, valorous and true, Messer John of Greccio, who for the love of Christ had left the secular army, and was bound by closest friendship unto the man of God, declared that he beheld a little Child right fair to see sleeping in that manger, Who seemed to be awakened from sleep when the blessed Father Francis embraced Him in both arms . . .

ST. BONAVENTURA, *Life of St. Francis of Assisi*, 1263

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Wolcum Alle

Wolcum be thu, hevene kyng,
Wolcum, born in on morwenyng,
Wolcum for hom we shal syng,
Wolcum yol . . .

Wolcum be ye Candylmesse,
Wolcum be ye qwyn of blys,
Wolcum both to mor and lesse,
Wolcum yol.

Wolcum be ye that arn her,
Wolcum alle and mak good cher,
Wolcum alle another yer,
Wolcum yol.

Author Unknown, Fifteenth Century

Gloria —

I shall always remember Midnight Mass in a French Alpine village not far from the Swiss frontier. There by the moonlight, I could see the black silhouettes of fir-trees pointed against the sharp whiteness. Deep in a crevice stood the church, surrounded by the minute chalets of the mountaineers.

As I left my inn, I saw on the nearby slopes dancing lights which slowly converged towards the church. They were the lanterns of the mountaineers going to Midnight Mass, and each of those stars was followed, not by the Magi Kings, but by troupes of delighted children. At the bottom of the ravine, the little illumined church shone like a lighthouse—a port where they could find at once repose, warmth, and, above all, love. The slopes were steep, and the children fell and laughed. But the difficulty only increased the value of the expedition. Never have I heard the Christmas hymns sung with more vigour than in the little church of Verrières, covered softly with snow.

After the Midnight Mass, the Christmas Eve revel came. Those who could, had the traditional turkey and foie gras, drunk down with champagne; the poor had beer and chicken or perhaps sausage. But in every home, red-berried holly and mistletoe; and in the fireplace a great Christmas log.

ANDRÉ MAUROIS, *I Remember Christmas in France*

— In Excelsis

Glory to God, this wondrous morn,
On earth the Saviour Christ is born.

BLISS CARMAN, 1861-1929, *Bethlehem*

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MILADY EVERGREEN

Who could this woman be, and what lost world was her home?

by DENTON WELCH

I FIRST saw her driving down the main street of the old inland watering place which I was exploring. It was impossible to miss her, since she drove in a dark green limousine belonging to King Edward the Seventh's reign. Beautiful brass carriage lamps glistened on either side of a chauffeur and footman, whose uniforms were also of dark green. She sat, perched up behind them in a glass box, a plump little woman, her brilliant terra cotta hair topped with a sort of black satin cottage loaf.

As the car drove by very slowly, she smiled and bowed to the people on the pavements with the greatest good nature and impartiality; she might almost have been parodying a royal personage. The round red face was crumpled and creased with so much smiling, but what was interesting was to see something in it to make me feel that a few of the smiles were for herself. She seemed to be enjoying her own preposterousness, laughing at it a little. It was as if she were saying something as simple as, "Oh, lordy, lord! the dear people in the street, and me sitting up here like an old Aunt Sally!" The little eyes were watering with amusement and pleasure; once she dabbed at them, then looked up to Heaven, and again I could imagine her exclaiming, "Oh, lord!" The mouth was a little open all the time.

Before she was past me, I remember thinking, "She holds her head rather stiffly; is she afraid that it might shake? If she wore jet bugles on that hat, would they still go on trembling after the car had stopped?"

My heart bounded at the spectacle she made in her progress down the street; for the world has become so mean that we no longer expect to be given the chance to stand and gape in admiration. When it comes, we are almost shocked, made to feel guilty. There is a return of that dreadful fear that seems to hang about all true fairy stories. Fairy godmothers, in spite of their goodness and magnificence, are sinister; golden coaches that suddenly appear may as suddenly disappear, leaving deserving girls in rags by the kitchen fire.

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I thought of all this as I turned down a narrow alley leading to the common. Who could the woman be? Was she some obstinate old dowager, refusing to be jostled out of the habits of her youth? She looked too sweet natured to be anything so tight. Perhaps she was a singer, an actress from the past, who still loved to draw men's eyes. Hugging the thought of her to me, I looked up; and there she was again in reality, sailing up the road that lay between me and the gorse bushes.

At the corner of the alley I waited to watch her approach. There were few people here, so for a moment she had stopped smiling and bowing. Her eyes were down on her gloves; she seemed to be playing a sort of delicate pat-a-cake with herself, placing one chubby hand on another, stopping sometimes to pick and pluck at her sleeve. In front of her the chauffeur and the footman sat so stiffly that they reminded me of two green bottles waiting to be uncorked.

When the car had almost reached me, some peculiar spirit took possession and I found myself bowing and smiling—almost as extravagantly as she did these things herself. The moment she noticed me, her face lit up; she fluttered her hand then turned to wave again through the oval bevelled glass at the back of the car.

What had I done? Had my excessive civility made her mistake me for a friend? Or was she interested quite simply in anyone who seemed to wish her well?

I stood staring after her until the car bowled round the corner and was lost in the trees.

I was not to find out any more about her until several months later when I was again in the town. While walking along the upper common, I suddenly came face to face with Alec Gale, whom I had not seen since school days. I was sure of him because I remembered at once that he had lived in the town all his life. After our first exclamations and surprise, we sat down together near some great slabs of rock and started to smoke cigarettes. All round us children played amongst the rocks, climbing over them, squeezing between them, laughing, screaming, digging in the sand that had collected in nooks and crannies.

Soon I was asking all about the wonderful woman with tomato hair.

"Oh, but don't you know?" exclaimed my rediscovered friend. "That's Evergreen Fanny."

My mind at once rejected the silly name, but I waited in silence to hear more.

"She's years and years old, nobody knows quite how old; my mother says she was seventy twenty years ago."

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Extreme age was something I had not associated with the woman in the car.

" She's an amazing ninety then," I said. " She looked more like sixty when I saw her."

" I know, that's the extraordinary thing; she never seems to change. Mother says she's looked exactly the same ever since she can remember. That's why everyone calls her Evergreen Fanny."

" Does your mother know her personally ? " I asked.

" Yes, in fact she's about the only woman Evergreen enjoys seeing; but she loves men. If you like, I'll get mother to ring her up and ask if we can go along this evening for drinks. Are you free ? "

I nodded eagerly.

" I shall always remember first seeing her," Alec Gale continued. " I suppose I was about five. My mother had taken me shopping, and on the way home we ran into Evergreen. We met her on the pavement in front of the hotel, only a few yards from where we're sitting at this moment. The brilliant red hair and fantastic clothes made such an impression on me that I couldn't take my eyes off her. All the time she was talking to my mother, I was staring open mouthed. At last Evergreen turned and wagged a finger at me archly. ' Isn't it sweet ? ' she said. ' I do believe the dear boy is admiring me.'

" My mother, whose guess was a good deal nearer the truth, bundled me off before I could say anything too frightful."

I was silent, remembering the effect of strangeness on myself as an infant. There had been a man who rode a blue bicycle and sang psalms at the top of his voice . . . but Alec was speaking again.

" Of course it isn't real," he said.

" What isn't ? "

" Why, the hair. It's a wig. The nurse who came to look after mother when she had pneumonia told us that Evergreen had three: best, second best, and everyday. At night she keeps all three on tall stands at the foot of her bed. But I'm not going to tell you any more about her; you must see her for yourself. As soon as I go home, I'll get mother to telephone. Come to tea with us and I'll take you along afterwards. Her house is only just round the corner."

He gave me his address and we stood up.

" Till this afternoon, then ! " he called, turning to wave to me before disappearing over a ridge. I thought I caught a glint in his eye, as though the idea of introducing me to Evergreen afforded him a wicked pleasure. Memories suddenly came back to me of the simple minded Casanova's delight in being taken to see a real duchess, and of his extreme discomfort when his malicious friend

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disappeared, leaving him in the clutches of the ancient and lascivious woman.

" But why should you think of anything so absurd ? " I asked myself. " Evergreen does not appear to be in the least lascivious; and even if she were, she would probably not have the slightest inclination to be lascivious with *you !* "

That evening, as Alec led me from his house to Mrs. Seaton-Leverett's, I was filled with doorstep fears and anxieties. I had never before been to see someone simply out of curiosity, and it seemed to me that I was bound to be found out and punished in some way for my impertinent inquisitiveness.

We turned the corner and began to walk down a street of late Victorian houses showing seventeenth century Dutch influence. Terra cotta plaques, elaborate gables in steps, broken pediments and heavy cornices diversified each simple family box. We stopped in front of one where a tiny crimson windmill whirred beside a cement pool fringed with jagged, skull-like glints. Not far off, emerging from a privet bush, a little cement girl, also painted crimson, lifted her frilly skirt invitingly and rudely.

Looking up, I saw that each windowbox to the house was a miniature crimson fence with a five barred gate in the middle. The scarlet of the geraniums behind fought interestingly with the crimson lattice work. All these commonplace garden ornaments had been given a strange grim twist by this brilliant blood red colour.

Alec led the way up the path and rang the bell. The door was opened by the footman I had seen in the car ; but how different he looked without his cap and uniform ! He was young and weak with thin damp hair, and bluish flesh about his nostrils. His suit was of dark greasy serge. He asked us rather breathlessly to wait in the dining room while he announced our arrival to his mistress.

As we passed through the narrow hall, I just had time to look up and see that the lampshade was a Japanese paper parasol hung upside down. The bright flowers and birds looked old, dust-greasy and fly-blown. There was the faintest smell in the air of ivy, ancient meals, cats, upholstery and fungus.

It filled me with a strange disturbance, perhaps because it brought so vividly to mind the phrase, " A living tomb." What did it mean ? A tomb for living ? A tomb that was alive ? This house was both.

All the curtains were drawn in the dining room and three electric bulbs dressed in red crêpe paper crinolines shone down on the table, making the yellow grey oak look pale and dirty and naked. The rest of the room glowed darkly and rosily. I heard the whirr of an electric fan and turned to find one in a corner,

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coloured ribbons streaming from its guard. It had the soiled gaiety of the Japanese sunshade and I was made to think of long forgotten fancy dress balls on battleships.

Seeing that the mirrored overmantel was stuck all over with cards, I went up to glance at some of them. They were invitations to garden parties, dinners, weddings, balls and christenings. All were yellowed, curling at the corners and thick with furry dust, so that they had an almost artificial air, as if they had been made to look old for a stage production. The few I read were all from peers. I remember best the garden party invitations from the two Marquesses whose once magnificent estates lay on either side of the town.

" She's kept every invitation she's ever had," whispered Alec, sliding up to me stealthily. " When she offers you sherry, she'll tell you that it's one of the last bottles from the cellars of her grandfather's castle ; she's been saying it for years. Actually she gets it round the corner where we do."

His jaunty interruption broke up my mood. I wished I had been left alone to contemplate the rosy butcher's shop glow, the dust, so thick that it had grown spider's legs and arms, the grandees' cards, and the writhing water lilies on the shoddy art nouveau sideboard. How was it that Alec, after seeing this interior, could still think of Mrs. Seaton-Leverett as a comic figure ?

But now the ill looking young man had returned to take us to his mistress.

" This way please, sirs," he said in his resigned, breathless voice. He led us up the stairs, glancing back many times as though he were afraid that we might not be following, or that we had not yet learned to climb stairs properly, and might be needing his help.

Whenever his eyes were off me for a moment, I turned to study the wall opposite the banisters. It was decorated with pages from a wallpaper sample book pasted haphazardly over the original dingy surface. A page of imitation brickwork followed a page of glossy marble. Purple grapes hung close to fantastic wood graining and a square of blood red damask. There was part of a frieze of pastel crocuses and a horny patch of Lincrusta panelling. My eyes began to rove and falter. The patterns and textures set before me were as bewildering as the profusion of dishes at a banquet.

And when we reached the drawing room, or boudoir, if that is a fitter description, and the man withdrew, leaving us alone, my eyes skimmed with such rapidity from object to object that I felt dizzy. Everything was known, commonplace, but in such incongruous relation to the next object that it became startling.

The bow window was draped in coarse grey lace ; from the

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middle of each opening a large Easter egg, decorated with tarnished scraps of tinfoil, hung down forlornly, reminding me of pictures I had seen of bombs about to drop from aeroplanes. Photographs covered the walls, and between these, especially round the fireplace, were large saucepans and frying pans, tied back with tasselled curtain cord, sometimes stuck with a posy of artificial flowers, a bow, or a tiny flag. A larger Union Jack covered an occasional table on which stood flimsy glasses, a plate of candied cherries, a plate of strident pink coconut ice and a decanter with sticky dribbles from the lip.

For me the room evoked extraordinarily the atmosphere of the Near Eastern brothel. Although I had never been in one, I had always imagined just such dirty lace, such chi-chi paper flowers, such sickly wine and sticky sweets. But there was one great difference. This room was sunless and a little damp. Perhaps the chill was all the more evident because one knew that this was no spider's parlour decked to lure in stupid flies, but a parlour decked for no other purpose than the owner's quirkish humour. She was alone with her scraps and tinsel, her Easter eggs robbed of their chocolates long ago.

A door opened and footsteps sounded in the passage. She stood on the threshold looking in at us. I had not expected anyone quite so short. Her black skirt was short. The sleeves of her white silk jersey were short, revealing puffy pink arms. She again wore a black silk hat; but this one was tall and straight sided, with the narrow brim pulled down to her eyebrows, so that only little puffs of red hair showed above each ear lobe. One chubby hand poised on her breast made me feel that she might burst into song.

"Ah!" she said, moving towards Alec serenely and jerkily, rather like a toy duck on little wheels. "Naughty boy for neglecting me so long!"

Still holding one of Alec's fingers she turned to me. "Now tell me what his name is—I'm sure I shall like it."

Alec introduced me.

I found myself hoping that she would approve of my combination of sounds.

"Oh, that's *very* nice. I like that."

She said it over to herself, savouring it on her tongue as some tea taster might sample his latest blend. A new picture jumped into my mind. I was not a person; I was just three syllables moving about and talking.

Mrs. Seaton-Leverett sat down in a basket chair near the fireplace. One hand was still on her bosom, and since her fingers

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played a perpetual tattoo on her breastbone, my eye was often caught by the dusty twinkle of her rings. They gripped the chubby fingers as brass bands grip the cormorant's neck; or were they more like tiny sparkling boa constrictors for ever tightening their death-hold?

I was able now to take in other details of her dress. The blue and white check, which hung down over the black skirt, was not a proper apron, but only an unhemmed piece of cloth pinned with two huge safety pins at the waist. Other smaller safety pins held strips of lace and ribbon in position aslant her bosom, so that she looked as if she had just returned from an investiture where some outlandish prince had decorated her with all his strangest orders. I pictured her going into shops, buying these snippets of lace and braid and ribbon, pinning them across her bosom at once to enjoy the effect.

She offered us the sticky sweets and sherry, and sure enough she told us that the sherry was one of the last bottles from her grandfather's cellar.

"It should be good, it should be good," she repeated airily; "my grandfather put it down years ago."

A slight pang passed through me; I could have wished that Alec's prophecy had not been so perfectly fulfilled. I was all for Evergreen. I wished her to be mysterious and unaccountable, baffling to those shallow people who came to smile or laugh.

My eye was caught by the glistening surface of a large photograph.

"Oh, that is a picture of your car, isn't it?" I said, over enthusiastically. "I like its body very much."

Her face lit up. "You do like it? That is nice; but, my dears, it has been *such* a trial. It has had to have a whole new engine. It appears that they couldn't do anything more with the old one. It has been a great expense, but I'm hoping now that it will go smoothly for many years."

For a moment she seemed to forget us; her eyes wandered to the window; she drummed on her bosom and murmured in a far-away voice, "Yes, yes, yes, it has been a great expense, but it's a nice car. I do like a car to be a car."

I cast about in my mind for something else to say, afraid of allowing Evergreen to sink too deeply into her daydream. Could I say anything about the decorated frying pans on the wall, or the old Easter eggs? I wanted to know their history, the reason for their preservation; but perhaps Evergreen would resent my curiosity; perhaps she would open those round little eyes wide and I would be made to feel like a pet pug who has misbehaved on the drawing room rug.

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It was Evergreen herself who broke the tension. Still in her faraway sing-song voice she began to tell us about her great-nephew who had inherited the grandfather's castle.

"He *is* a naughty boy," she mused, shaking her head; "he's got rid of the place to the National Trust—the whole village as well, if you please! And he never consulted any of us. He shouldn't have done it; it wasn't right."

"But aren't you glad that it will always be preserved now?" I asked, trying to say the soothing thing.

"Yes, but that isn't the point; he shouldn't have parted with it without letting us all know."

Evergreen was still shaking her head, but her expression had softened; she seemed to be willing to excuse her nephew's naughtiness, because, if the truth were to be told, she really admired his boldness, his decision, his high handed behaviour.

I nibbled a piece of coconut ice, sipped my sherry. The footman came to the half open door, then slipped in furtively, a box entirely encrusted with tiny iridescent shells in his hand.

"Excuse me, Madam, the cigarettes," he murmured, putting the box down on the Union Jack tablecloth.

"Oh! How clever of you to remember, Henry," said Mrs. Seaton-Leverett affectionately. "I'm afraid I never think of offering them, because I don't smoke myself."

As soon as Henry had left, she turned to us and said, "I'm not at all happy about him. You know he's not strong, and now I'm so afraid Somebody or Other will take him off and put him in some dreadful factory."

"But surely not!" protested Alec. "They can't do things like that. He's in a perfectly good job here with you."

"Oh, do you think so? I'm so relieved. I felt that they might say that he was much more necessary somewhere else; but he ought not to do anything strenuous; he mustn't have strain; he can't stand up to it." Evergreen's solicitude was charming.

But was this to be all? Were we only to have light gossip about her car, her nephew and her servant? Would none of the fantasy of the house get into the conversation? Every tinsel flower, every saucepan and miniature flag held a secret, some thought or feeling embalmed in it. The whole house seemed filled with tiny, unseen presences. They were all waiting for us to go; we were prying, curious people, the outside world. Evergreen fenced with us politely, kept us at bay. However long we stayed, she would utter nothing but friendly platitudes.

I could see that Alec was growing restless; everything pointed to our going, yet it was very reluctantly that I rose to my feet.

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I wanted to stay with Evergreen alone. I wanted to hear her talking in that dreamy far off voice, describing the ancient balls, the marriages and christenings.

" What, are you going, my dears ? " she asked, suddenly taking notice of us standing before her, ready to hold out our hands. " Now you must come again, both of you, soon. I liked your name so much—what is it ? " she added, turning to me.

Delicate Henry showed us to the door; he seemed more resigned, more patient than ever. From the top steps of the porch he smiled at us, rather as a dying man might smile a brave farewell to his wife and children.

I did not look round until we had walked a few paces down the road; then some wish, perhaps, to see the crimson garden ornaments for the last time made me turn my head.

My eyes travelled to the windowboxes on the first floor; there was Evergreen, standing in the bow window with the dirty lace curtains pulled aside. She was staring down at us with a curious look of incomprehension on her face. It was as if she did not know who we were, or what we were.

She would look thus, I felt, at the woodlice and other strange insects found under a stone. She was not hostile, but on her guard, a little repelled by what she saw. Hers was a ghost face at the window, in a dream; and then the glass pane turned it into a drowned face staring up from the bed of a clear river. She had taken off her hat, so that the unbelievable hair rose up from her forehead like a sulky flame. The unyielding eyes beneath were still upon us; the mouth had not yet found any reason for being pleased.

Turning away abruptly I tried to speak to Alec, to share some fragment of my thoughts with him. I wanted to say: " She is a prisoner in that extraordinary house; each object binds her with a spell." But how hollow it sounded! How artificial! He would only laugh. I could not express the half of my thoughts; they were as unformed, as numerous and impossible to catch as tadpoles in a pond.

Soon afterwards I heard of Evergreen's death. I heard, too, that she had divided her fortune between Henry and the chauffeur. It was difficult to imagine Henry enjoying thirty or forty thousand pounds; he had been so self-effacing, so breathless, so fragile. How would he bear the great weight of Evergreen's money? Had she dealt him a blow from another world? Finally flattened him out under a pile of bank notes?

Alec told me that the house was empty now, that all the crimson ornaments were gone and the windows blank; but I knew that the

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spirits of the paper flowers, the invitation cards, the coloured streamers, and the frying pans would always lurk there for me, together with the figure of Evergreen at the window and the amazing sullen lazy flame of her hair curling up into the shadows.

* * *

KING OF THE CASTLE!

These men certainly considered themselves gods of their own firesides. Allow one point for recognizing the master, one for the author, and one for the source, making twenty seven points in all. Twenty or more points merit an extra bowl of punch and double helping of plum pudding! The answers are on page 99.

1. *"Does he study the wants of his own dominion?*
   Or doesn't he care for public opinion—a JOT?"
   Some one, or nobody, knows I wot!
2. *He was haughty and cold, cruel to his daughter, tenaciously ambitious for his weak son, and it flattered him to think that his proud and stately second wife would be maintaining and heightening the family name in his own chill manner.*
3. *This city dweller's thoughts were for a lonely estate on the banks of a lake—where "midnight's all a-glimmer . . . noon a purple glow, And evening full of the linnet's wings."*
4. *"Be clamorous," he said, asking a shipwrecked stranger to speak with the wealthy countess he loved—"Leap all civil bounds, Rather than make unprofited return."*
5. *"Don't give yourself airs!" this phenomenal and aggravated sage advised his son. "I have answered three questions, and that is enough—Be off, or I'll kick you downstairs!"*
6. *He was past seventy, had just lost his second wife, and felt his 'manor' needed a woman. He proposed to his daughter's old governess—only to discover to their mutual chagrin that she was married already!*
7. *He was a fiend in feline shape—ginger, tall and thin—the bafflement of Scotland Yard, the Flying Squad's despair, for he always had an alibi and one or two to spare!*
8. *This grim Yorkshire stalwart, tormented night and day through eighteen years, got the sexton, digging her husband's grave, to remove his love's coffin lid. And then "I dreamt I was sleeping with my heart stopped and my cheek frozen against hers."*
9. *His last wife had a heart too soon made glad. She smiled on everyone—"This grew; I gave commands; Then all smiles stopped together." Now her portrait hangs in his gallery to be shown to visitors.*

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AN ELEPHANT BEHIND YOU

No questions could be asked—no answer hoped for

by DAVID WALKER

"LET'S have a smoke," said Bob Winton. They sat down on a fallen log and lit cigarettes, and the morning was cool in the Bengal jungle, lush after the monsoon. When you compared it with Calcutta, you wondered how you could ever have endured two years in that hot, unloved city, coming out of the office to meet the furnace and the smells. Oil was why you endured it. You went up the hot way in the oil business.

But that was far away. Even the thought of Susan was a little indistinct—shadowy and delightful, so that you could hardly believe you would see her again today. The real and present things now were the place you were in and the man who was your companion.

You thought a lot about Barlock, the professional hunter, a man of medium height, with the rubbery strength of a welterweight boxer, and the lightness of foot; agreeable enough in his own formal, prickly way, but cold, so that you saw the ruthlessness in every silent step he took in his jungle boots. Then he would stop and smile, showing his white teeth, and point out another story in a sandy *nullah*; and on again, never in a hurry.

In the jungle Barlock was at ease. This was where he belonged. But even in the peaceful camp beyond the river, he was a different person. He would sit in the evenings while you talked, gnawing his knuckles, brooding, a taciturn man without repose. You didn't know what went on behind those dark Eurasian eyes. You had wondered from the very start, but you had wondered still more since the warning about him in Susan's letter.

When I told Daddy that your hunter-man's name was Barlock, he nearly exploded. He says B. is a notorious elephant poacher; he's been in prison for assault, and he's very *dangerous. If only Daddy had known before you left . . . So please, Bob, be careful. My father says if there's any trouble, go straight to the police at Raliguri; and whatever you do, don't quarrel with him.*

Well, that came two days ago, and you supposed there must be something in the warning, because Susan Durnford's father was

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not the sort of man to make a fuss about nothing; and yet, in a way, you rather liked this fellow who got you your first tiger at the end of a week, and had taught you more in a fortnight than an ordinary man would teach in six months. And there hadn't been any trouble. It was obviously true that none of the men—the *shikari* and others—liked Barlock, but they were careful to carry out his orders.

Bob didn't exactly have affection for him, but he enjoyed being with him on these morning prowls along narrow path and *nullah*, and learning from him the teeming, quiet story of the jungle.

"Where does your family hail from?" Bob asked now.

Barlock smiled. "From many places, Mr. Winton. My grandfather was an English soldier. And I have Indian blood, French from Chandernagore, and some Tibetan; so I am a mixture, what you call chee-chee."

"I suppose your being part Tibetan is what makes you so different from most Anglo-Indians."

"Perhaps it makes me different," said Barlock, and now his voice was bitter. "But we are all in the same boat, between devil and the deep sea. And because we cannot succeed, we never forget the colour of our skins." But he changed the subject abruptly. "Those fresh elephant tracks back there; I think, perhaps, it is a muckna. There has been one in the next jungle block."

"What's a muckna?"

"A tuskless male. The tuskers drive them from herd; so they are alone and troublesome, and do much damage."

"I'd like to see a wild elephant."

"Come then," said Barlock. "We will follow tracks. But be ready to climb. If he is must, if he has the breeding urge of male, then he may be dangerous."

Barlock led the way, going slowly along the path between long grass and under trees, halting often to listen and watch. Bob was carrying the double-barrelled .318.

But now Barlock had frozen in the middle of a step and was staring intently through the dark green jungle. "There it is."

Bob looked for a long time before he saw the elephant standing not a hundred feet away, facing directly towards them, with only the ears moving, flapping. The faint breeze changed direction. Then things began to happen.

"Better climb," said Barlock laconically.

Bob slung his rifle, jumped for a low branch, heaved himself over, climbed with an uncomfortable shiver of urgency in the back of his neck, and they were both safe by the time the elephant squealed and charged, bursting through grass and young trees with appalling momentum. The animal did not wait below the tree,

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but lumbered off a few paces, turned to face them again, and was still except for the ears. It watched with myopic malevolence.

"Yes, he is must," said Barlock in an ordinary voice. "He is a bad one."

"Well, if he's a rogue, why don't I shoot him?" Bob raised his rifle.

"No, Mr. Winton!" said Barlock sharply. "You must not! It is a serious crime! It is prison offence!"

"Well, here we are up a gum tree," Bob said. "What do we do? Stay all night?"

Barlock did not answer for a while. He was glancing at a long clump of fair sized trees which stretched across the glade and out of sight. Then he looked at the elephant again.

"I will lead the elephant off," he said coolly. "I will lead him through those trees where he cannot be quick enough to get me. Then I will cross the river farther up. When it is safe, you climb down and return to camp."

"Well, you'd better take the rifle."

"You keep it, Mr. Winton."

Barlock's complacent smile told Bob that here in the jungle Barlock knew his own superiority, that here he could exult in the power denied him in places of human habitation.

Barlock slipped down from branch to branch, and jumped the last ten feet. In three steps he was among the trees, watching the elephant again, which had turned towards him. The animal's trunk was rising.

"Ha-a-a-w!" called Barlock deeply, waiting for it.

The elephant trumpeted and charged, but the man flitted ahead of the heavy animal, turned to watch, then went on again as lightfooted as a cat.

The trees did not stand so close that the animal could not get through them, but they were near enough to one another to make him check and swing. Barlock's lithe skill, the elephant's brute power as he tore trees out by the roots—Bob never forgot that sight.

They disappeared. The sounds swung towards the river. Bob climbed down from his tree and walked home quickly.

It was no surprise to him to find when he had punted across the river that Barlock was already waiting at the camp, drying himself in the mild November sun.

But if there had been no signs of trouble up to then, they soon began to show themselves. Later in the morning Bob watched a cluster of men round the flap of Barlock's tent. The *shikari* was there, a youngish, handsome fellow; the cook; a couple of men from the village; even the sweeper lurked humbly in the back-

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ground. And there was that tenseness about them and about their voices, quieter than usual, which showed that something was wrong.

"What's the matter, Nur Mohammed?" he asked his own bearer, a greybeard who had been with him ever since he came to India.

"Sahib, it is pay," he said. "These men work two weeks, not get money against promise. That is bad. Also he say now less than promise."

"Well, I expect he'll fix them up." Minor pay troubles were endless in India. They seemed to be the inevitable price for being so well cared for.

Nur Mohammed looked uncomfortable. "Sahib, he is bad man. He cheat and always angry."

As he spoke, there was a shout from Barlock's tent; the men retreated and walked off in a bunch, with the sweeper trailing last.

Bob peeled off his shirt, took Susan's letter from the pocket, and sauntered over to sit in the sun beside the river. It was a hundred feet wide, just fordable now, becoming shallower every day. On this side there were trees and open places, but the jungle came right down to the far bank.

He read the letter again, because he was in love with this girl, and she might be with him, so anything she wrote about their two selves was a fire and a pleasure not like words.

I persuaded Daddy to let me come fishing with him, and he says our camp is just a mile above you on the river. So we'll be there on Monday morning. Isn't it wonderful?

Barlock walked over, and Bob stuffed the letter into the pocket of his shorts.

"Hello," he said. "Did that elephant give you much trouble?"

"No," said Barlock. "An elephant is easy." He said it so that you knew he did not mean elephants were easy, but rather that elephants were easy for him, Barlock.

"Is it likely to hang around?"

"Perhaps," said Barlock, "if there are females in this part of jungle. But you cannot tell what they will do. Elephants are unpredictable."

"What was the matter with those men?" Bob asked idly.

"They try to make trouble for me," said Barlock sourly. "Every day they ask for more wages, for higher wages. It is always the same with these plains people. They are no good."

"The country people seem all right to me," Bob said. "Did you pay them?"

Barlock glanced round at him and away quickly, but that one

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look was enough to tell Bob that Durnford had not sent a warning about this man for nothing.

"Yes, Mr. Winton." His voice was level.

Well, there was no point in shoving his nose into things. He had paid Barlock, and paid him the tiger bonus, too. The men's wages were none of his business so long as there wasn't real trouble.

"What's up?" he asked kindly. "You seem a bit blue."

Barlock shrugged. "Yes," he said. "Yes, I am. You are a good man, Mr. Winton. You understand very well. But these people despise me, and the Europeans, too, and sometimes I am full of hate. I cannot help myself."

"Perhaps you think too much about it. Perhaps you imagine things."

Bob was often sorry afterwards that this conversation had not been finished, because he had learned enough of the strange Barlock to know that the man was a rebel who might have been very different, if his opportunities had been different; that he was a man not able to accept the lot of his kind, never able to make peace with himself except in a violent mastery of nature. Perhaps he might have been able to help him that afternoon before it was too late.

But at that moment Nur Mohammed coughed behind them.

"Man is come from Durnford Sahib," he said. "Sahib is at camp with Miss Sahib."

Bob forgot about Barlock's troubles. Susan was never far from his thoughts, and these two weeks away from the city had served to brighten the picture of his need for her and of the comfort and exhilaration he found in her nearness.

"The Durnfords are people I know in Calcutta," he said to Barlock.

"You mean Mr. Durnford, the head of the chamber of commerce?"

"That's him. Know him?"

"I know of him," said Barlock, shutting up like a clam.

"I think I'll go along now. I may not be back till dark unless you send word of a kill."

Bob went to his tent for his shirt, took the light rifle—a .256 Mannlicher—checked that it was unloaded, put a clip of shells in his pocket and hurried upriver. Soon he felt the good warm trickle of sweat on his chest. After two weeks of this, he was fitter than he had ever been in his life—not trained fine, but tough with well-being, every muscle loose.

Susan was sitting in the shade. She got up to meet him. "Hello," they both said, and were silent, not needing words, yet shy of each other in a way, meeting for the first time in a new place.

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"You look positively bursting with health," she said in a minute, and they walked back to the cluster of trees where two white tents were being pitched beside the river.

"When did you get here?"

"An hour ago. Daddy's fishing already." She pointed upstream.

Mr. Durnford stood to his middle in the water, spinning for mahseer. The sweep of his cast was lazy and expert, like the rhythm of a good golfer's swing, and the spoon glinted in the sun as it plopped near the far bank. The man recovered slowly, took a few paces downstream and cast again.

"I didn't think you'd come," Bob said.

"Did you get my letter?"

"Yes, I did. I have it with me now." Bob felt for the letter, but it was not in the pocket of his shorts. Now that was odd; he had been reading it at the river. Well, perhaps he left it in his tent. He dismissed a vague uneasiness when Susan spoke again.

"How are you getting on with Mr. B.?"

"Quite well, myself, and things were more or less all right until today. But now there seems to be a bit of pay trouble with the men."

"Do remember what Daddy said."

"Oh, I don't think it's much. I have a feeling that they're ganging up on Barlock in a mild way. He doesn't seem to be a bad fellow, but I think he has a sort of obsession about every hand being against him, and he's never really normal and easy except in the jungle. You ought to see him there. Listen to what happened this morning." Bob told her about the elephant.

"That was wonderful, but he does seem strange and fanatical."

"Yes, I think 'fanatical' is the right word. He's the sort of man who could have been a nice fellow, but he works up his superiority in the animal kingdom, and that makes the inferiority complex hit him all the harder."

"You do love analyzing things."

They both laughed, and after that they forgot about everything except themselves till Durnford came back.

"Hello, Winton," he said, sitting down beside him. "Hear that fellow got you a tiger. Quite a coincidence, us having the fishing nearby. Susan's suddenly become an ardent angler." He leaned on his elbow and talked spasmodically, cursing the ants in an irascible fashion.

"Is this him?" said Susan suddenly.

Bob stood up. Barlock had been hovering along the bank, but he came over now, and Bob knew with his quick instinct that the man had both enjoyed and hated standing in the background as

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the poor employee waiting his master's pleasure. But there was more than that, for Barlock's face was oddly stiff and immobile.

"I didn't see you," Bob said.

Barlock put his hand into his pocket, drew out a piece of paper and thrust it at Bob. "I think this is yours, Mr. Winton," he said in a flat voice. "I found it on the riverbank."

Bob took Susan's letter from him, thinking, *Oh, damnation. That's torn it properly.* Then he said, "Thanks," and turned. "Do you know Miss Durnford and Mr. Durnford?"

Susan smiled politely at him. Durnford glanced up and said hello without enthusiasm. When you came down to it he was the sort of individual who might have greeted anyone that way, but it didn't exactly help matters now.

Barlock's lips trembled. He bowed stiffly, quaintly. "I will go back then, Mr. Winton," he said, staring at Bob, and walked off.

"You shouldn't be so rude, Daddy."

"Who, me?" Durnford looked surprised. "Said hello, didn't I? You don't expect me to fall on his neck, do you?"

"It wasn't that that was worrying him," said Bob. "He found Susan's letter warning me about him. It must have fallen out of my pocket."

"Oh, Bob! Do you think he read it?"

"I know he read it."

"What possessed him to bring it to you?"

"Because he was mad at me and you," said Bob. "That's just what a fellow like him would do, and I can't say I blame him. I think I'd better go after him."

"Don't do anything of the sort," said Durnford. "Let him cool off. If you go after him now, there's sure to be trouble."

"He was all right till that pay trouble today," said Bob. "And now this letter makes matters worse. I blame myself for that, and I can't help being a bit sorry for the man."

"Let's swim," said Susan suddenly. She went to her tent.

"I don't want young Susie to get in a stew," said Durnford, "but I didn't much like the look on that chap's face."

"Is he really dangerous?"

"Not normally. But when he's in one of his moods"—Durnford shrugged his shoulders—"they say he's as dangerous as a king cobra. The time they jugged him for assault, he'd tied a chap he was angry with to a tree and beaten the lights out of him. How on earth did you get in with Barlock?"

"He advertised under a box number, and I knew nothing about tigers, so it seemed a good idea. He is a wonderful man in the jungle."

Durnford frowned. "Yes, he's that all right."

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Susan walked down to the river, calling, "Are you coming in?"

They swam in the warm clear water. It was so perfect that you wanted to go on doing just that forever, and you knew it was a moment you never could recapture.

Afterwards they had lunch, and Durnford went for a nap. Bob and Susan were sitting on the bank, saying almost nothing, when they heard the noise.

It was a swelling concatenation of men's voices, of many people shouting.

The shouting grew louder, and it had moved from the direction of the village over now to the left, where his own camp lay. Then they heard the rifle shot. It rang out sharply, and there was silence after that, except for the strident calls of parakeets across the river.

"I'm going back," Bob said, slinging the rifle on his shoulder.

"Please don't go," Susan pleaded. "I know that something awful's happened." She held on to his sleeve.

"Of course I have to go," he said roughly. "With old Nur Mohammed down there? Of course I have to go."

"I'm coming, too, then."

"Don't be crazy. Anyhow, it may be nothing. I'll send a man up to let you know right away."

"Well"—she leaned forward and kissed him on the lips—"please be careful, Bob."

"I'm in no mood for heroics," he said, smiling. Then Bob was running fast down-river.

It was Nur Mohammed who came to meet him, and his ashy look reminded Bob to load his rifle. "What happened?" he asked.

"Sahib, Barlock kill *shikari*." He pointed to the centre of his forehead. "*Shikari* come again for pay. Barlock angry. *Shikari* angry. Barlock strike him." Nur Mohammed made a punching gesture with his hand. "*Shikari* fall down and go away to village. Then all village men stop work, come shouting. Barlock hold up hand. They not halt, very angry. He shoot *shikari* in head. Take sahib's money from me, put food in pocket, keep rifle ready, make man drive boat across river. He went away in jungle."

There must have been a hundred men gathered at the tents, all sorts and conditions of Indian peasants—Hindus, Moslems, old and young, dusty from the fields they had left—joined for once in a common purpose; and there was the blankness of horror in their faces.

Bob moved the cloth from the *shikari*'s face. He was dead all right.

Bob turned his back on the men, wondering what he should do.

"He is mad, sahib," said Nur Mohammed at his shoulder. "Sahib, his face suddenly mad."

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"Which way did he go?" Bob asked abruptly. His mind was racing. Mad? Yes, a man as near the edge as Barlock would certainly be mad.

"Into jungle," said Nur Mohammed, gesturing with his hand at the green wall opposite.

Shoot one enemy, then shoot the others? Yes, that was just what would occur to a man suddenly crazy.

"Send someone quickly to Durnford Sahib," he said. "Tell him what has happened. Tell him there is danger. He and the Miss Sahib must stay far away from the riverbank. Understand?"

"Yes," said Nur Mohammed calmly. He understood exactly.

"Tell him I am going after Barlock."

"Sahib, it is dangerous," said the old man.

The punt was sunk in shallow water at the other side. Bob waded up to his shoulders, holding the rifle high overhead and praying fervently that Barlock was not aligning the ivory tip at the bottom of the wide V on him now from the trees. Soon he had climbed the far bank and was moving along the path.

How much start did Barlock have? Twenty minutes, perhaps. The river ran south, and all to the east of it was jungle so there were a hundred winding paths that he could follow. But he was a hillman, born and bred in the hills; he would go back to his Himalayas in the north. Yes, that was certain. And his quickest route was in the very direction where madness might take him. He would look across the river from up there, and if he saw the man who had blackened his name and spurned him with casual indifference, or if he saw the girl who had warned Bob—just one more shot to settle the score in his seething brain?

Bob sweated at the thought of it. He started along the path, up the same path he had followed on his way back from the elephant. He went quickly, moving with the careful absorption he had learned from Barlock himself, watching now not for animal tracks, but for the distinctive pattern he had noticed every day on the ground ahead of him. There was one, but it was old; and the next was old, blurred at the edges, and the next. But here in a soft place at the side of the path—here was a fresh print of a rubber sole.

His eyes left the ground and searched the growth ahead, still tangled and green from a hundred inches of monsoon rain. But there was nothing—no man, no animals, no birds, no snakes. *Why never no snakes, for heaven's sake, in the land of snakes? Why never no—?* These ridiculous words sounded on in his head. *Why never no snakes?* But they were only an accompaniment to his alertness—to the cold knowledge that Barlock had moved along this path a few minutes ago with the double-barrelled .318 which had a muzzle

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velocity of more than three thousand and struck with a merry smack; to the cold knowledge that Barlock could walk right round you unseen, without your ever being any the wiser, only the deader; and to the cold knowledge that if he wasn't waiting for Bob Winton, he might be drawing a clear mad bead on Susan Durnford.

There was a sound, then, on the right. Bob stopped, and his heart began to thump. No, that wasn't Barlock; that was the heavy scuttering of a pig. Silence again. *You must hurry. You must hurry.* But hurry too much and let him hear you, then you'd have been better crawling on your belly. Over this *nullah*, look left, look right, look down at a new footprint. Look ahead and see nothing except a few yards of path, and an orchid—yes, a pink orchid up that tree. But no Barlock.

Here was the elephant place. Here was the very tree you had climbed with an elephant behind you. Bob moved faster now across the clearing, snapped a twig, froze, cursing himself inside, moved on. He caught a glimpse of the silent river on his left and a flash of white beyond it. That was the Durnfords' camp at last.

Bob paused a moment; heard the croaking song of a frog, monotonous; heard nothing else on this side or on that side; saw another fresh footprint. But it might be all right. Barlock was following the track, and it swung ahead away from the river.

You'd know soon now. You'd know in a couple of minutes if it was all right or not, and every bit of you was tingling taut. You checked for the nth time that the safety catch was off, moved again, stopped in the jungle dank all round you . . . and why did that jungle fowl fly from there in front? Why? Making the squawk of an outraged cockerel. Why?

Here was the sound you'd been expecting. Here it was now, the small babbling rush of the stream which tumbled down across its own sandy *nullah* and out to the river opposite Susan's tent.

He knew what he was going to do. He was going to listen once more. Then he was going to turn left and stalk a hundred feet down that silent sand to the river's edge, and if he saw Barlock in this place he was going to plug him cold; no questions asked, no answer hoped for.

He listened, with the rifle ready and his forefinger neat and clever on the trigger. He stepped forward and down on to the sand.

"Mr. Winton," said Barlock.

And Bob's back was turned, for the voice did not come from down on the left. It came from upstream.

"Drop it." Bob did not drop it. He wondered what he could do, while his spine went cold and the hair did things at the back of his neck.

"I said drop it." A little louder. Bob dropped it.

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"Take a pace to the right." Bob took a pace to the right.

"Face me." Bob faced him.

Barlock sat comfortably on a small flat rock in the *nullah*—the only rock, as a matter of fact. His elbows were on his knees. The two muzzle holes were lined up like a pair of small spectacles steadily on Bob's chest.

"Sit down, hands on toes." Bob sat down with his legs crossed flat and his hands on his toes. Fear was right through him.

Barlock was smiling. "I expected you, Mr. Winton," he said. He looked quite friendly, except for the dark eyes, wide open, which said nothing at all. A big vein stood out from the peak of his black hair down to the space between his eyebrows. As dangerous as a king cobra was what Durnford had said. Durnford didn't know.

Bob's heart beat up high. If a bullet was coming now, would you ever see it start? No, you wouldn't, but you could imagine the copper breaking up inside your chest. "You'd better hurry up and shoot," he said.

"Everything in due course," said Barlock. He smiled again. "You know, Mr. Winton, I liked you very much. I thought you were a fine fellow till you deceived me."

"Bob!" It was Susan's voice down there at the river, calling beyond the stream; and how beautiful was the anxious voice, the clear voice above hurrying water. Why had she come? Well, that was obvious. Damned crazy, all crazy. Bob opened his mouth.

"No," said Barlock. "She is the one I would not like to shoot. Do not call out, Mr. Winton. Be patient."

Go away, he thought. Please God, go away. But what now? What was there left that you could do? Rush him? Not the faintest hope. Dive for the tall grass five feet away? No hope. Call out? No. Talk; that was the only chance while hope faded into despair.

He heard the grinding of the boat at the same moment that he saw something move right beyond Barlock, up the soft sandy *nullah* where the stream flowed on one side. It was the elephant; his ears were moving slowly; the point of his trunk was poised delicately in mid-air, feeling the wind which blew diagonally. He was a big elephant, a big beautiful elephant now, from ground level.

He shortened his view again to Barlock, seeing the mad marvellous composure of that face. He watched the nose with wide sensitive nostrils, then widened focus so the nose was blurred, but the elephant was sharp beyond. Yes, it really was there. And the elephant was padding tentatively, silently, placing one big, floppy, loose-articulated leg slowly after the other on white sand, on bare sand cleaned by the monsoon, and the stream still babbled merrily.

"Winton!" It was Durnford's voice, this side of the river.

"I see them splendidly," said Barlock. "I will let them come

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nearer. Then we will have three ducks in a row—two dead drakes and one live duck."

"Do you like duck?" said Bob, keeping it going with a crazy one, as crazy as the man himself.

"Yes," said Barlock politely. "Teal is best, early in season, in November. Shot clean and roasted."

And all the time the elephant was coming down the *nullah*, closing the angle of the breeze which ruffled Bob's hair from the right side behind and was chilly through his wet shirt. The elephant was hearing, but still hadn't quite got the scent. Silent, monstrous pachyderm. Back on to Barlock's nose again; look at his eyes. But they had not changed; they were as muddy and deadly as ever. Widen focus, but less now because the elephant was close and still no sound louder than the rushing stream—but a low branch there. Would it pass under? Yes, it had passed under, and it had stopped, and the human scent had come to it, for the trunk was rising. No tusks, a must muckna—a musty muckna. It was bound to get Barlock this second time.

But Barlock's face was stiffening, and his eyes were looking at the two beyond. He was going to do it now any moment.

"The elephant's behind you!" Bob's mouth was dry.

"I learned that trick long ago, Mr. Winton." The same gentle voice. Barlock did not move a muscle.

Susan's voice again, "Bob! Are you there, Bob?"

Why doesn't the damned animal charge?

There was no surprise at all on Barlock's face when the elephant squealed. He did not even turn, and the grey trunk flecked with pink took him swiftly, delicately round the neck, lifted him and broke his skull against the rock, and the rifle blasted above Bob's head.

Then the elephant was on its knees. Shooting a must elephant at thirty feet was a picnic, even if you knew there might be sand in the rifle. And the others were shouting behind. Bob gave it the bullet in that weak spot between the eyes. He gave it three bullets with the little .256 before the brute toppled dead beside the remains of Barlock.

Here they were, running to him. But if Barlock had been mad as a hatter, he himself, Bob Winton, was suddenly as mad as a bear the first day it wakes in springtime.

"Why the devil didn't you do what I told you?" he said, seeing this girl with a red-hot fury.

"Couldn't stop 'er, Winton," said her father.

* * *

The only thing to do with good advice is to pass it on.

OSCAR WILDE, 1856-1900

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★*The famous New England witch hunt and trials at Salem, Massachusetts, in the Seventeenth Century are local American and British history. British because the colonists who took part in this hysteria had undoubtedly carried with them, in inflammable form, the superstition of their mother country.*

In all, twenty so-called sorceresses were hanged, burned at the stake or "pressed to death" during those months of terror, and while the scare was on, no one was safe. Credulous men and women declared against members of their own family—and even those leading the persecution found themselves accused in their turn.

But the fury was short and sharp, and when the law finally asserted itself, the hysterical outburst died as suddenly as it had arisen, though spasmodic rumours of spectral appearances, confederations of witches and unnatural deeds continued long after and had their fitful following.

A KISS FROM LUCIA

by RODERICK MacLEISH

THEY came in from the hills and the outlying farms. Some came from so great a distance that they rose before dawn and returned to their homes long after the sun had set. But still they came to Salem on Sunday for church. Church was the end purpose of everything; it was the citadel of worship, the social centre—indeed it was the very reason that they had migrated to this wild and unploughed land.

And they liked Pastor Chapin. He was a simple man, stern and devout, earnestly seeking to understand their sufferings and to guide them to their salvations. The old preacher lived alone in his house, observing with strict piety the laws of his sect. All his energy and zeal had been directed to one end; the defeat of Satan in the colonies. To Pastor Chapin the war against the Lord of Evil was *his* war, personally bestowed on him. In some earlier year he had suddenly had a presentiment of the devil, and because of it he had cast aside everything in his grim dedication. He was unmarried and sought neither love nor friendship, and lived only to banish Old Scratch from the colonies forever.

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Thus it was surprising to his parishioners when, on a sunny May morning in the year 1622, they came in to worship at Salem, and saw a young and very beautiful girl standing by the Parson's side as they left the church. Surely he had not married at so late an age? No, the question was quickly answered. As each member of the congregation passed by, the girl was introduced as Lucia—daughter of Parson Chapin's late brother from Jamestown.

"How nice to have you among us," smiled Mrs. Warren, "and so nice for the parson!"

"A man ought to have a woman in his house!" laughed the huge, burly Miller as he shook the girl's hand.

For each Lucia had a shy, becoming smile and a simple answer. And when everyone had passed by, she turned to her uncle.

"You see," he said gravely, "they *do* like you, my dear."

Lucia's dark eyes turned downwards and her fair skin reddened. "I didn't come to have them like me," she murmured, "I only want to make you happy—and to help you."

The Parson smiled tenderly. "You are a good child," he said. "Come, we'll go to dinner." He locked the church door and, taking the girl's arm, walked sedately homewards.

Never, thought the Reverend Mr. Chapin, had the world seemed so bright. The little town was through its winter; each log house was scrubbed from attic to cellar and as they passed along in the sunlight, each door was open to admit the fresh spring air. On the hills the buttercups and little purple cornflowers were blooming brightly, and beneath the town, not far away, the river ran clear and sparkling, swollen with the melting snow. Now, to complete the peace, this lovely child had come to make his house gay with her laughter and beauty. The girl was tall, with long black hair and dark eyes that seemed to reflect all the goodness of the world. With all of this, thought the Parson, no evil could ever permeate his parish.

As the weeks passed by, Lucia's beauty did not go unnoticed. Young men came calling at the Parson's house to walk out with the girl. But they found little opportunity, for she was busy morning and night, scrubbing, cooking, helping old Mother Avon, the Parson's housekeeper; and even assisting the minister in visiting the poor of the parish. And sadly, after a passionate declaration of undying devotion, each suitor turned away. Lucia had no time for them, her only interest was her uncle and the busy life of his house.

But one suitor was more persistent; Sam Bower had never learned to take no for an answer. Each day he could be found in the minister's house, following Lucia about, joking with Mother

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Avon and even helping the Parson. It became accepted in the parish house that the tall young man would cut wood, re-shoe the team and help with the manual chores. And as the spring turned into summer and the summer to a brown, warm autumn, a struggle grew within Lucia. Her growing affection for Sam was obvious, but she seemed determined to remain unmarried, to serve her uncle until the end of his days.

One night, when the minister had retired early, Lucia came into the room where Mother Avon sat sewing by candlelight. The old woman looked up and smiled. "Good evenin', my duck, and are ye not out walkin' with yer young man on this fine night?"

Lucia sat on the long bench beside the fire and shook her head. "I told him to go away," she said softly.

"Now what a silly thing to do!" cried Mother Avon. "He's a fine one, and the prize of every girl in Salem!"

"It's too late now," said Lucia, a catch in her gentle voice. "I'll probably never see him again."

"Now, now," the old woman soothed, "you just make up to him and tell him you're sorry—and he'll come back like a rabbit!"

"But how can I tell him?" sobbed the girl. "He'll never come back!"

"Ye might send him a note?" suggested Mother Avon, resuming her sewing. "Have ye no place where you could leave it?"

Lucia nodded her head. "In the tree—on Banal's hill."

"Then you just write him one," said Mother Avon, "and take it there—and he'll come for it for sure, if I know my lads!"

"But I can't!" wept Lucia. "I can't go there alone at night!" She dried her eyes and looked appealingly at the old woman. "Would you—could you?"

Mother Avon laughed. "It'd be a poor man who'd bother the likes o' me at night. Write it, child, and I'll take it!" And so the note was written and handed to the old woman. "And where did ye say the place was?" she asked.

"On Banal's hill, in the trunk of the dead tree."

Mother Avon frowned. "'Tis a strange place—they say the witches meet there!"

Lucia smiled. "No witch would bother you," she said gently. "They come only for the wicked."

Sam Bower stood alone in the tavern, staring moodily at his tankard of ale. All round him the men were laughing and talking, but there was no joy in big Sam's heart. He was thinking of Lucia, her strange reticence and the quarrel that had finally parted them.

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In his simple, logical mind, there was no reason for Lucia to turn him out; he saw that she obviously loved him, but that very fact seemed to frighten her. The tall, blue eyed farmer scratched his head and puzzled as men always have about the ways of women.

Suddenly the door of the tavern burst open and a girl's scream broke the soft babble of voices. Sam turned quickly to see Mary Turner, wife of Elias Turner, standing in the doorway. Her hair was loose and tangled, her dress torn and her eyes wide with fear. She stood paralyzed for a moment, staring wild-eyed into the room, her breath coming in choking sobs. "Elias," she gasped, "Elias . . . Oh, my God! . . ." She tottered forward, to fall into her husband's arms.

Swiftly the men gathered about her. A glass of brandy was brought and soon the terrified woman opened her eyes. "Elias," she said, her voice low in terror, "I saw it . . ."

"You saw what?"

"Himself—I saw—" she choked and turned her face into her husband's arm, sobbing hysterically. When she was soothed and able to speak again, her eyes were wide. "I was walking—to Mother Gammon's—she's been ill—I went to take her broth—suddenly, just this side of her gate—suddenly I saw a huge hound—a beast, Elias! His eyes were red, flaming, and his mouth dripped molten fire! He came for me, Elias!"

The men gasped. Elias Turner shook his wife roughly. "And then, Mary?"

"I ran—I screamed—but he was faster than I," she sobbed, "and suddenly I fell—the dog leaped at me, roaring and growling—I threw up my hands as he came for my throat, and then—then—"

"Yes!"

"*He spoke!*"

There was a stunned silence. "Good God protect us," muttered one. "A very devil," said another.

"The Devil himself!" sobbed Mary.

"What did he say?"

Mary Turner choked as she answered. "*On Banal's Hill—the witches fly—the first to go—the last to die—*" Then sobbing with terror, she threw her arms round her husband's neck and would speak no more.

Slowly the men drew away from her. The gaiety of a few moments before was forgotten. Fear was in their eyes. They had dreaded this moment; for years they had heard the warnings. Voiced through the land by the stern voices of their preachers, roared in the wilderness by Cotton Mather, told again and again from their own pulpit by Parson Chapin. They had heard that Lucifer would come to seize the colonies, that no man could escape

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the shadow of the Lord of Evil and one day he would walk from the forest to claim their souls. They had shuddered at the solemnity of the sermon, and now the autumn night seemed chill as they thought of the ominous warning that had come to them.

"We'd better get the preacher," said one.

"No, wait!" cried another. "Think what it means! *On Banal's Hill the witches fly, the first to go, the last to die!* There's a witch on th' Hill. He who gets her first will be spared the longest!"

"Aye! Let's get her!"

And like wind on the wheat the fever spread among them. Within moments they were spilling out into the night, armed with pitchforks, clubs and rifles. A few protested but were quickly shouted down. Torches were brought, and suddenly Salem was alive with the flickering firelight and the shouts of the mob.

Swiftly they ran the length of the town and out into the open fields. Sleeping birds rose in the trees as they passed, and dogs followed in their wake, howling with excitement. The foot of Banal's Hill was quickly reached, and in an instant the slope was alive with the frenzied mob.

The men spread in all directions and swarmed up the hillside—and then, suddenly, there was a loud shout.

Down among the gnarled roots of a dead tree, her eyes bright with terror, crouched Mother Avon.

Again and again the judge pounded his gavel, and presently the courtroom became quiet. Never before had so many people crowded into the small space; men, women and children had come from miles around as the story spread. They were gathered half in a holiday spirit, half in fear, to view the witch. The terrible meaning of the trial seemed distant in the bright sunlight, and the heinousness of the accusation did not fit the old woman who sat slumped before the bench.

"Oyez, oyez," droned the provost, "the people of the commonwealth versus Marion de Baun Avon, accused of witchcraft and conspiracy with the forces of evil . . ."

Tremblingly Mother Avon took the witness stand and the trial began. First the prosecutor spoke, telling the grim story over again. Next Mary Turner, frightened and refusing to look at Mother Avon, took the stand and in a trembling voice told of her wild visitation.

At last Mother Avon herself spoke. Her voice quavered as she told how she had carried the note for Lucia and how, when turning away from the tree she had seen the mob coming for her.

Then the court called Lucia. "Your name is Lucia Chapin?"

"Yes, m'lord."

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"And you have heard the testimony of the accused?"

"Yes, m'lord."

"What say you to her charge—that you sent her to the hill with a note for this young man."

Lucia blushed. "She is a good woman, m'lord, and I am sure . . ."

The prosecutor smiled gently. "We are not asking that you defend her, my child, just speak the truth. Did you send her to the hill?"

Lucia's head bowed. She clasped her hands in desperation. When she looked up, there were tears in her eyes. "No, m'lord, I retired very early upon that night. I did not see her after the evening meal was done." Her voice was low and sorrowing.

"That will be all." The prosecutor turned away.

"But, m'lord!" Lucia rose in the stand and looked appealingly at the bench. The prosecutor turned, eyeing her quizzically. "She has done much good," pleaded Lucia earnestly. "I beg you reconsider; she is not guilty of evil . . ."

The prosecutor smiled. "Evil," he said softly, "comes in strange forms."

Suddenly Mother Avon was on her feet. "The girl lies!" she screamed. "'Twas she that sent me!" The old woman broke away from those who restrained her and ran to where Lucia stood. She fell on her knees and threw her arms round the girl's legs. "Tell them, child! Don't let them burn me . . ."

In an instant Lucia was on the floor beside her, her arms round the thin old body. "Spare her," she sobbed. "Oh, spare her."

Swiftly the trial moved on as the damning evidence built higher and higher around the old woman. And at last, when Parson Chapin spoke, there was no power left to save her. Triumphantly the old man rose. For years he had fought an invisible enemy, one that dared not show himself before the preacher's might. Now Satan had come into the open for a last desperate stand.

The Parson began his speech in a low, quiet voice. He spoke of the teachings of Isaiah, of the simple wisdom of the Proverbs and of the prophecies of Paul. Then his voice grew louder as he turned to recounting the fall of Lucifer. And at last his mighty words thundered against the very rafters, filling the courtroom with their exhortation as he demanded the death of the woman who had cast her lot with Satan.

When he had finished, the room was silent. Then the verdict came and the witch was condemned to die.

Lucia sat very quietly. The firelight played on her beautiful eyes and danced in the soft rolls of her hair. The white skin of

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her cheeks was wet with tears and she stared straight before her, seeing and hearing nothing.

At last her uncle rose from his chair and put his arm about the grief-stricken girl. "Do not weep, my child," he said gently, "she died in knowledge of her God."

Lucia leaned against him wearily. There were few tears, no more grief would come from her. "Did she suffer?" she asked.

"Through their suffering, the wicked shall find salvation," replied her uncle. "Do not grieve for her—there will be more—many more . . ."

"I—I feel—that I might have saved her," said Lucia softly.

"You would not want to save a witch," Parson Chapin said. "You did her service by telling the truth—for now, perhaps, she is with God and has forgiveness for her sins."

Lucia slipped her hand over his arm. "You were wonderful in court. I could not help but be proud."

Parson Chapin smiled. "And I was proud of you."

Lucia leaned against him. "I'm glad we're alone at last—there have been so many people—so much to do."

"I shall have to get a new housekeeper."

"No!" She looked up at him and smiled through her tears. "I am mistress of this house now—and want no other woman to help me."

He began to say something, but stopped. He began to remember that she was a woman—and then, in another instant, that she was his niece, the daughter of his brother. Gently he kissed her and rose. "I shall go to bed now."

She stood with him. "Good night." She put her hands on his arms and drew him to her and kissed his cheek. "When there are others to fight, I will be here—always here." The old man held her for a moment and then went hastily from the room.

Again Lucia sat by the fire, staring into the darkness and seeing nothing. Suddenly there was a knock on the door. It startled Lucia out of her reverie, and she rose to admit Sam Bower.

"Well, Sam," she said, "this is late to come calling."

"I had to see you," he told her. "I saw you in the court . . ."

Lucia sat on the bench again. "It was terrible," she said softly; "the poor woman . . ."

"But she was a witch!" cried Sam. "She deserved to be burned!"

"Do you believe that all evil should be banished?" Lucia suddenly asked him. For a moment her lovely face was hard and her eyes narrow as she waited for his answer.

"Of course," Sam said—"of course."

Lucia said nothing, but turned to look into the fire. Gently

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Sam knelt beside her. "Lucia," he said, "don't send me away again."

He talked to her for a long time. He told her again that he loved her, he told her about the farmland he would buy, the house he would build for her and the children they might have.

Suddenly she stood up. The tears were fresh on her cheeks again. "Stop!" she cried desperately, "it can never be. I can't marry you!"

"And why not?" demanded Sam angrily. "I'm as good as any man in Salem!"

"It isn't that. I didn't come to fall in love; I came to . . ." Abruptly she stopped speaking and turned away from him.

"What *did* you come for, Lucia?" asked Sam tersely.

"Good night." She did not turn back, but walked quickly from the room, closing the door behind her.

The autumn preceded a cold winter that year, and the prediction of further mischief came true. As the winds howled through Salem's deserted streets, the manifestations of witchcraft were everywhere. A tree burst into flame in Piety Chester's farmyard and Piety died by law before the week was out. In a nearby village three little girls were suddenly seized with fits and their mother was burned at the stake. All through the colony, the disciples of Satan seemed suddenly busy.

And always Parson Chapin was there. He had become exultant in his battle—restlessly probing every story and outburst, ruthlessly pushing the prosecution of the offenders. Some died screaming their innocence, others fought grimly for life until the flame or the rope snuffed out the last spark. From his pulpit the Parson thundered out names and accusations, exhorting his congregation and proclaiming that the Devil was abroad in the land.

Lucia stayed close by her uncle's house that winter. She worked as before, scrubbing floors, washing and cooking, seemingly content with no company but his. From time to time Sam came to see her, but she always sent him away. She seemed violently afraid of her growing love for him. At times, after his visits, her uncle would find Lucia weeping bitterly, but her tears were always unexplained.

Parson Chapin struggled in his own battle against Satan that winter. Suddenly Lucia had seemed more lovely than ever before. Her slim, shy girlhood had grown into the haunting beauty of a mature woman. Each night she waited for him, and by the candlelight of their dinner, her gentle face and strong body seemed overpoweringly desirable—and the preacher fought grimly to be blind to her.

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Time and time again Lucia protested that she loved no one—not even Sam Bower. Her only love, she said softly, was for her uncle. And in the sleepless nights, Parson Chapin puzzled over what form her love took and hated himself for wondering.

At night he would hear her moving about the house, long after the entire village was asleep. Occasionally he thought he heard voices, Lucia's and others, but always his mind and senses were drugged with weariness, and he dismissed the sounds as dreams. He would not rise to investigate her reason for being awake and about; for he did not trust himself to go to her when the world was dark and still.

And in the village they said that she was dutiful and good.

The spring came late that year and brought no joy. In the hearts of the people of Salem there was a mixture of dread and weariness. The fear of the evil works was still upon them, but they were tired of the man-made terror of the rope and stake. Old friends and loved ones had died, and the people turned to Parson Chapin to question how long it would go on. But still the preacher thundered from his pulpit and stalked the streets and countryside in search of his elusive enemy. Always it seemed that Parson Chapin was winning, for even the behaviour of the town improved.

All this time, Sam Bower worked on his new land with confidence that Lucia would change her mind. He cut down trees, cleared away fields, and when May brought the yellow and purple flowers to the hills, the foundations of a log cabin were rising on Sam's acres.

Then at last, one rainy night, the fires that tormented Preacher Chapin burst from within him and he rose from his sleepless bed to go to Lucia who moved about the dark, silent house.

For a moment he paused outside the parlour door, his heart pounding wildly, then silently he pushed it open. His heartbeats seemed to stand still and the breath caught in his throat.

The small room was dark, illuminated only by the flickering light of the fire. Lucia sat before the hearth, her back to the door. She was no longer the quiet, dutiful niece. Her long hair was loose, tumbling over her shoulders, gleaming ebony black in the firelight. She wore a low nightgown and her feet were bare. In her hands she held a small wooden statuette and a knife. Slowly the glittering point of the instrument bit into the little figure.

For a moment the girl did not sense the Parson in the room, but when she turned her eyes seemed to gleam with an inner fire and a slow smile played about her lips. "Well, Uncle?" Her voice was low, and trembled as it filled the room.

"Lucia!" gasped the preacher. "You're . . ."

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"Yes?" Her brows arched as she fixed him with her beautiful eyes.

"You *did* send Mother Avon to the mountain," he whispered, "and it was you who . . ."

"Burned the tree in Piety Chester's farmyard, and spoke in the throats of children," she answered.

"Who are you?" muttered Parson Chapin, backing away.

Slowly Lucia rose and smoothed her nightgown with one hand. She was framed against the firelight, beautiful and evil. Her face was in the shadows and only her eyes glowed brightly. "A thousand women," she said softly, "over ten thousand years. When the victims of the Borgias died, it was I who poured the poison, and when Judas was tempted it was I who held the silver."

"Sister of Satan—Lucia!" whispered the Parson, his forehead bright with perspiration. "A name like his—Lucifer—Lucia! Born of my brother and come to . . ."

"To defeat you," she smiled, "to manifest magic so that many would die—and thus to destroy you by their deaths—to make you loathed through all time as the witch-burner of Salem!"

"But I have found you out!" he cried triumphantly. "And I will destroy you to atone for what I've done!" He lunged towards her, reaching for her slim body.

"Not yet, Matthew Chapin," she purred. Swiftly she grasped him and ripped his shirt front open. Then with a darting movement she placed her mouth on his chest. Parson Chapin cried out in pain as her lips burned into his skin. He struggled to push her from him, and she fell back against the table, breathing heavily. "Here!" she cried, shoving the wooden statuette and knife into his hands. Then she ran screaming from the house into the rain.

She stood barefoot in the little street, shrieking hysterically. Candles were brought, and soon a half dozen men were by her side, calming and soothing the sobbing girl. The rain poured over her, wetting her hair and mingling with the tears on her face. "He—he attacked me!" she moaned. "He tried to kill me!"

Sam Bower put his arm round her. He spoke to her softly, his words coming with calm assurance. "What happened—Lucia, beloved, what happened?"

"I came into the parlour," she sobbed; "he was by the fire; he was putting a knife into an image; then I saw the mark on his chest, and he struck me. He tried to kill me!"

The men were silent. They stared in horror at the girl, hardly believing what she told them. Then one of them spoke. "'Twas he who burned them," he muttered. "'Twas the devil's trick!"

"Aye, he hung my Meg!"

"And 'twas he who made the tree burn and the children speak!"

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"'Tis Satan himself!"

Angrily they rushed past the weeping girl and into the house. They pushed forward, down the narrow corridor and kicked open the parlour door.

Parson Chapin stood numbly beside the table, holding the knife and little statue in his hands. He did not seem to see them there, nor did he protest when their rough hands tore open his shirt to expose the smoking scar on his chest. It was burned deeply into his flesh—the sword with which Lucifer had attacked the City of God.

Grey clouds scudded across the spring sky, and the wind moaned in the newly budding trees. Last year's leaves rustled over the ground, whirling past the heavy stake that stood buried in the earth. By ten in the morning the crowd had gathered silently round the place of execution, and by noon they brought the preacher.

He stood quietly as they tied his arms and piled the brush about him. Some had come in pity, others came believing that they saw the death of Lucifer himself. And some could only remember what he had done, how he had guided them from his pulpit over the bitter years of the colony's birth.

His sorrowing niece was not present. Lucia had been in the court at his trial and her pleas of mercy for her uncle had moved the crowd deeply.

The old Parson stood quietly as they finished binding him, and then, gently, he began to speak. He asked them forgiveness for the many who had died at his instigation; he asked forgiveness for his other sins—over zealousness, ambition and pride. And then, at last, he began to speak of the forces of hell.

Sam Bower turned away from the outskirts of the crowd. He was one who came with loyalty in his heart for the minister. He walked with his head bowed towards the parish house, the voice of Parson Chapin fading in his ears.

The door was unlocked, and he went in without knocking. He entered the parlour where Lucia sat writing at a little table before the window. He spoke to her softly.

The girl looked up. "I did not hear you come in," she whispered. She was dressed in black and the stern shade of the mourning contrasted against her white skin.

"He is about to die," said Sam gently. "Will you not go and bid him farewell?"

She shook her head. "I cannot," she said, dropping her eyes.

"He was the strongest among us," said Sam; "he was our faith itself."

"Please," she said, "go now."

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He moved a step forward. "You have no one. Now will you marry me?"

She shook her head. There were tears in her eyes. "I can never marry you, Sam," she said, a catch in her throat, "I cannot fall in love—I dare not—I did not come for it . . ."

"That's the second time you've said that," he said, looking at her strangely. "Tell me what you mean and I shall go."

Again she shook her head. "Please," she whispered desperately, "pity me and go—immediately."

"Look at me, Lucia!" he demanded. "Look at me and think how happy we might be."

"Please," she implored, "for the love of . . ."

"Yes!"

". . . of Lucia . . ."

"Can you not say God?"

"Go! Sam—now!" There were tears in her eyes as she turned her pleading towards him.

"What are you writing?" he demanded.

Quickly her hand slid over the paper before her. "A letter," she said, "to my brother . . ."

"You have no brother, Lucia," he answered grimly. "Let me see it."

He looked down. From beneath her fingers a thin coil of smoke curled as the edges of the paper turned brown and crinkled inwards. Suddenly it burst into flame and was soon a smouldering ash beneath her fingers. "Now will you go," she said softly, "and quickly—for your own sake?"

"That's why you fear me," he whispered. "You dare not love a mortal; you dare not love at all!"

"I have tried to turn from you, Sam," she said. "Now, for your own sake, I beg you to go. Already I have damaged myself by sparing you."

Sam looked out of the window at the crowd in the square. "You can still save him," he muttered. "Go—quickly—tell them!"

"No," she said, rising, "I cannot; I dare not. It was he whom I came to destroy."

Swiftly Sam took her by the shoulders. Her flesh was warm beneath his fingers and burned as he dug into it. "Look at me, Lucia," he said fiercely. "Look at me!"

"No—please . . ." She pressed away from him.

"Lucia! You love me—look at me!"

Her body shook and tears streamed down her face. Tightly Sam held her until she turned her head and looked into his eyes. "Now *I* will burn instead," she whispered. "But for it I will have a kiss."

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Her lips burned his cheek as she pressed into him, and her eyes were hot and smouldering. Then she drew away and went swiftly towards the door. "Hurry!" he cried. "Hurry, Lucia!"

She ran across the square, with Sam following close behind.

The executioner was bending to touch the torch to Parson Chapin's pyre when Lucia's hand seized his wrist and stayed him. "Wait!" she cried. "I must speak!"

"Mistress," said the prosecutor, coming forward, "you cannot save him now."

"Release him," said Lucia firmly; "he is innocent. It was I—" her voice dropped—"who put the mark upon him."

The crowd gasped, but the prosecutor held up his hand. "Go, child," he commanded, "you cannot save him now!"

Swiftly Lucia gathered her skirts about her and stepped over the faggots that were piled about the Parson. As the crowd swept back she touched his bonds one by one. And as she touched them, they burst into flame and dropped from him. "Be free!" she cried to him. "You have won!"

She turned to face Sam who stood at the edge of the crowd. There were tears in her dark eyes and the wind blew in her hair. "I will burn for you," she sobbed. "I should curse you—but I cannot. I can only curse my coming!"

Suddenly, before the astonished eyes of the crowd, the faggots burst into a roaring fire. Higher and higher the flames leaped about her, as if a wind from the bowels of the earth stirred them into an inferno. Then, as the long tresses of her hair splintered into flame, she held out her arms towards Sam, and he alone heard her last despairing cry. "I will return," she wept. "I will return!"

And all through his life Sam Bower carried her lip marks on his face. But it was an honourable mark, and people looking at it would recall how the sister of Lucifer was defeated in the colonies by the love of a mortal man.

* * *

SOME DELAY

A French under-secretary was invited to the silver wedding anniversary of a distinguished English bishop. "Silver wedding?" he asked the bishop's nephew. "It is a ceremony which I do not quite grasp."

"My uncle and aunt," was the reply, "have lived together for twenty five long years without being separated a single day."

"Ah!" said the Frenchman. "And now he marry her? *Magnifique!*"

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SHOAL WATERS

But—a Passage perillus makyth a Port pleasant

Inscription on a harbour wall on Lake Como

They went to sea in a Sieve, they did,
In a Sieve they went to sea :
In spite of all their friends could say,
On a winter's morn, on a stormy day,
In a Sieve they went to Sea !
And when the Sieve turned round and round,
And every one cried, " You'll all be drowned ! "
They called aloud, " Our Sieve ain't big,
But we don't care a button ! we don't care a fig !
In a Sieve we'll go to sea ! "
Far and few, far and few,
Are the lands where the Jumblies live ;
Their heads are green, and their hands are blue,
And they went to sea in a Sieve.

They sailed to the Western Sea, they did,
To a land all covered with trees,
And they bought an Owl, and a useful Cart,
And a pound of Rice, and a Cranberry Tart,
And a hive of silvery Bees.
And they bought a Pig, and some green Jack-daws,
And a lovely Monkey with lollipop paws,
And forty bottles of Ring-Bo-Ree,
And no end of Stilton Cheese.

And in twenty years they all came back,
In twenty years or more,
And every one said, " How tall they've grown !
For they've been to the Lakes, and the Terrible Zone,
And the hills of the Chankly Bore " ;
And they drank their health, and gave them a feast
Of dumplings made of beautiful yeast ;
And every one said, " If we only live,
We too will go to sea in a Sieve,—
To the hills of the Chankly Bore ! "

EDWARD LEAR, 1812-1888, *The Jumblies*

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Innocent Abroad

It was not until they came in sight of the white cliffs of Dover, at which even the seagulls seemed to gaze with misty eyes of affection, that Fifine was suddenly sick.

I don't mind the boat going up, she thought, but I *do* wish it wouldn't come down. Now what have the fates in store for me? I am about to become an alien, I am pregnant with barbarism. And I shall be—although my intentions in coming to England were never so innocent—an object of suspicion. My trunks must be searched for drugs, immoral literature, gramophone records, and leather.

And that black velvet dress which I have had for three years—they will insist, of course, that it is brand new, that I have brought it to sell. My recent purchases will pass unnoticed. But these adorable people understand so little: as with children, that is part of their charm. It is a fault of the French, on the other hand, that they are old, they understand too much, and in advance of one's intentions . . . Ah, now I feel better. Shall we join the ladies?

ANTHONY THORNE, *Cabbage Holiday*

While I Remember . . .

There was no break in the weather. The sea was white like a sheet of foam, like a cauldron of boiling milk. We pumped watch and watch, for dear life . . .

And there was somewhere in me the thought: By Jove! this is the deuce of an adventure—something you read about; and I am only twenty—and here I am lasting it out as well as any of these men, and keeping my chaps up to the mark. I would not have given up the experience for worlds. I had moments of exultation . . .

To me she was not an old rattle-trap carting about the world a lot of coal for a freight—to me she was the endeavour, the test, the trial of life. I think of her with pleasure, with affection, with regret. I shall never forget her . . . Pass the bottle.

JOSEPH CONRAD, 1857-1924, *Youth*

Quicksand

A seafaring man may have a sweetheart in every port; but he should steer clear of a wife as he would avoid a quicksand.

TOBIAS SMOLLETT, 1721-1771
The Adventures of Sir Launcelot Greaves

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Initiate

" I beg your pardon," said the Mole, pulling himself together with an effort. " You must think me very rude, but this is all so new to me. So—this—is—a—River ! "

" *The* River," corrected the Rat.

" And you really live by the river ? What a jolly life ! "

" By it and with it and on it and in it," said the Rat. " It's brother and sister to me, and aunts, and company, and food and drink, and—naturally—washing. It's my world, and I don't want any other. What it hasn't got is not worth having, and what it doesn't know is not worth knowing. Lord ! the times we've had together ! Whether in winter or summer, spring or autumn, it's always got its fun and its excitement. When the floods are on in February, and my cellars and basement are brimming with drink that's no good to me, and the brown water runs by my best bedroom window ; or again when it all drops away and shows patches of mud that smells like plum-cake, and the rushes and weed clog the channels."

" But isn't it a bit dull at times ? " the Mole ventured to ask. " Just you and the river, and no one else to pass a word with ? "

" No one else to—well, I mustn't be hard on you," said the Rat with forbearance. " You're new to it, and of course you don't know. Otters, kingfishers, dabchicks, moorhens, all of them about all day long and always wanting you to *do* something—as if a fellow had no business of his own to attend to ! "

KENNETH GRAHAME, 1859-1932, *The Wind in the Willows*

Dream Cargoes

There is a memory stays upon old ships,
A weightless cargo in the musty hold,—
Of bright lagoons and prow-caressing lips,
Of stormy midnights,—and a tale untold.
They have remembered islands in the dawn,
And windy capes that tried their slender spars,
The torturous channels where their keels have gone,
And calm, blue nights of stillness and the stars.

Ah, never think that ships forget a shore,
Or bitter seas, or winds that made them wise ;
There is a dream upon them, evermore ;—
And there be some who say that sunk ships rise
To seek familiar harbours in the night,
Blowing in mists, their spectral sails like light.

DAVID MORTON

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ADAM AND EVE

A crazy idea? Well, that depends how you look at it!

by CLIVE BURNLEY

IT was very rash of her to go. Even if he were such a charming old gentleman. But Maureen Howe went, all the same. She boarded the eleven-ten at Paddington with her weekend case in one hand and her portable typewriter in the other.

Where would she find herself by nightfall? Or would she perhaps not find herself at all, but be found by other people, doubled up in a cabin trunk in a station cloakroom?

She didn't very much care. She was young, beautiful, tender, talented; and she didn't care. The eleven-ten went clickety-clack hour after hour across the frosty, flat waist of England, and she didn't care. The truth was that Maureen Howe had reached the stage of disillusionment and boredom in which crises, national or personal, cease to be critical.

She was *Howe's Typewriting and Secretarial Agency*. She shared a tiny office in St. James's with Myrtle, who was *Top Rank Domestic Servants Bureau*. Myrtle interviewed top-ranking domestic servants over, around, and almost under the feet of Maureen. This was one of the minor irritations. Others were her little two room flat looking on to and into someone else's little two room flat; an angry commercial traveller whose *Report on Sales* she had headed *Retort from Wales;* and most especially a young teaplanter who had that very week sailed off to plant more tea without ever having asked Maureen to share his domestic caddy.

As a result, when every instinct warned her to say no, she said yes; she said she would go down over the weekend to do some work for Mr. McFarnel at his house in Somerset.

McFarnel was seventy. He was pink and chubby, with a cherubic smile in which he showed his little white teeth—all his very own. Occasionally he came to London, staying at a small hotel round the corner, and brought Maureen manuscripts for typing. He usually brought with them a bunch of flowers or a box of chocolates, and always paid his bills with the addition of a twenty five per cent bonus.

And he was mad. Maureen had watched the progress of his

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mental disorder as it was reflected in his manuscripts. At first these had dealt with only mildly unbalanced topics like the *Lost Tribes* or the *Great Pyramid Theory*. Later they were concerned with the *Lamp of the Rosicrucians* and *Perpetual Motion*. And finally McFarnel had plunged into a boundless field of his own invention.

It was Mr. McFarnel who had proved, in six thousand words and with six diagrams, that the solar system, so like an atom in structure, was, in fact, just that. It was an atom, he clearly proved, in the leg of a table in the next universe up the scale. That table itself stood upon another planet, itself part of another atom, and so on without end. It was Mr. McFarnel who discovered that nightingales had a vocabulary of six thousand words, and who wrote a grammar of the language in tonic sol-fa.

It was Mr. McFarnel who wrote and published, at his own expense, a *History of the Wars of the Roses*, which was an account of the protracted struggle in his Somersetshire acre between the Red Ants of the Pergola and the Black Ants of the Compost Heap, whose politics he claimed to have followed, treaty by treaty and conference by conference, with the help of a magnifying glass and a neutral ladybird. It was he who had invented the portable escalator for mountaineers, the pocket gills for deep sea divers, and Peripheral Cordascope, of which no one else ever made head nor tail, and which was probably important as showing for the first time in science the *intransigence* so noteworthy in contemporary poetry . . .

Such was the man; and clickety-clack, hour after hour, the eleven ten was taking Maureen Howe nearer and nearer to whatever ogre's castle he lived in.

In the late afternoon she stepped on to the platform of Bilberry-sub-Mendip, and saw around her the brown hills out of which here and there stuck stumps of rock, like teeth in an old man's gums—although not in Mr. McFarnel's. In the station yard was a small black car, and standing beside it a small earnest-faced man with a white beard carefully trimmed to a point.

"Miss Howe? Ah! Gimme your bags."

"Are you Mr. McFarnel's chauffeur?"

The man nodded. "Chauffeur, gardener, valet, footman, butler, labourer, charge-hand, liftman, bell-boy . . . name o' Hoskin."

"You must be a busy man."

"Always was. I've always been with Mr. McFarnel. Me and my old woman look after 'im now. *Than* the guv'nor," said Hoskin a little aggressively, "a better man never drew breath."

"I'm sure not," said Maureen.

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"Than him," went on the chauffeur, "there isn't a cleverer man living! If we all had heads like his, we wouldn't be where we are now!"

"I really do agree," she said truthfully. But Hoskin's tone seemed to imply that he had some secret doubt, and was trying to convince himself.

"Jump in," he said.

Half an hour later Maureen leaned on the windowsill of the bedroom to which she had been shown at Hill House, and studied appreciatively the rows of brown and frosty ridges, becoming bluer as they became more distant, which stretched away to a remote streak of sea or estuary; it was a far better prospect than the familiar view from a two room flat.

Hill House did not seem an ogre's castle; it was not very large, but an excessively flamboyant late Victorian building in which the Scottish baronial style had been industriously if not very deftly blended with several others, resulting in the appearance of a candle-snuffer tower over the Doric entrance columns, and Gothic windows flanked by little obelisks.

Mrs. Hoskin was a reassuringly mild and matronly person; Mr. McFarnel himself was at the moment out or occupied; dinner was to be served in three quarters of an hour, and altogether Maureen thought it possible that, after all, she might not be strangled at all.

She was leaning thus at her window when there came a brisk tap at the door.

A voice said, "Excuse me, may I come in?" and immediately thereafter a young man put first his head, and a moment later the rest of himself, into the room. He was a tall young man, with untidy dark hair, a rather pleasant lopsided smile, and a regimental tie.

"Do excuse me," he said. "But I heard Mrs. Hoskin bring you up—my room's just over the way—and I prefer to introduce myself because I can give myself a much better build up that way. You're Miss Maureen Howe, of course—and my name's Shaw. Jerry Shaw."

"Oh," said Maureen. "How d'you do. I didn't know that anyone else—"

"Didn't he tell you about me? But that's much better. I can tell you about myself. I'm a sort of back room boy, you know. The fact is, I'm a working guest, like yourself. Same racket. And aren't you ashamed of yourself? I am."

"Ashamed!" said Maureen. "What *do* you mean?"

"Oh—you know."

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"I most certainly do not," she said, lifting a coat hanger in a carefully absentminded way out of her case, but at the same time wondering how it would serve as a weapon, if wielded by the hand of indignant virtue.

"Oh, don't be insulted," he said. "Let me explain. I run a little business, you see, making models for patentees and exhibitions. Fascinating, you know. I always liked toys, even as a child."

"But what has that to do with . . . ?"

"I make models for old McFarnel. Every now and again he gives me an order for one. A rocket to Mars, or a tunnel to Australia, or a rack-railway up Everest. I make 'em and he pays cash."

"With a little bonus?"

"As a matter of fact, yes. And cigars at Christmas. But, anyhow, I make them. I don't say 'Look here, old man, this is absolutely *delirious* and I won't touch it!' No. I say, 'Yes, Mr. McFarnel, certainly Mr. McFarnel, very good Mr. McFarnel, it'll be ready in six weeks Mr. McFarnel, that'll be a hundred and twenty pounds.' Destroys one's self respect, don't you find? Like taking threepenny bits out of a blind beggar's tin mug."

"Is it?"

He shrugged his shoulders. "I just thought you might feel the same. I know you do his typing. You must know it's all delirious. I thought you might feel the same—playing the poor old crank for a sucker. Like selling a cocked hat to a man who thinks he's Napoleon."

"I see what you mean," admitted Maureen. "But, you know, I don't think you're right. It keeps him happy, all this. Very happy. And what else would you do? Get a psychiatrist to ask him if he was ever frightened by a big black dog? That sort of thing would kill him surer than cyanide."

"All the same, I can't help feeling we ought to give our profits to charity. But, of course, we don't want the padded cell. That's what old Hoskins is afraid of, you know. He adores the old man—and you can't help liking him—only he's terribly afraid some well-meaning soul will rush him off and have him certified. But it's one's relatives who usually do one little kindnesses like that, and I gather the old boy's the last of his line. Ah, well! Do excuse my bursting in. See you at dinner."

That meal was served in a room crowded with lights and shadows that hung upon the profusion of the carved detail on the panelling and on the mantelpiece, and on the moulding of the ceiling, where cherubs and cornucopias and helmets, spears, flowers, and unlettered scrolls, were richly crowded. Something of a period

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piece also was the urbane geniality with which old McFarnel presided, while Hoskin and a scared maid did the waiting. During the meal the host spoke rationally enough of the bud virus in the West African cocoa plantations, and of the future of occupied Europe—which was, in the light of what followed, a strange topic to choose.

"Hoskin," he said, when the meal was over, "we'll have coffee *below*." The manservant looked vaguely troubled.

"Come with me," said McFarnel to his guests. "I have something to show you."

It was at this point that the party stepped through the looking glass. Or perhaps it was more akin to the occasion when Alice fell down the rabbit's burrow.

The old man led them to what was plainly a cupboard under the back stairs, but when they opened the door it was not a cupboard but a little lift, one of the hydraulic variety with a rope running through the floor.

"That's pretty lazy," said Jerry. "A lift for three floors."

But the lift, which was already at the bottom of the house, did not go up. It went down. With the faintest of purrs, it went down, down, down, thousands of feet it seemed to Maureen, although in reality no more than thirty seven.

"But where on earth—"

Although, of course, she knew. She had encountered similar situations scores of times, at the cinema. They were descending to the mad doctor's dissecting rooms, to the demented inventor's robot factory, to the greenhouse in which flourished the man-eating orchid. At the very least, to the headquarters of foreign agents, with bombs ticking in corners, or of a white-slaving baron.

When the lift stopped, Mr. McFarnel opened the gates and flipped a light switch.

"Ooh!" said his guests, together, like children at a firework show.

They were surrounded by grotesque shapes. Hunched, wrinkled, withered shapes; some that were fantastic parodies of men, of animals, of velvet curtains. Shapes of all colours and sizes. The light of a sixty watt bulb draped them in dramatic shadows. And they knew instantly what they were.

Those that hung down were stalactites, those that stuck upwards, stalagmites.

"A cave, by George!"

"Yes, Mr. Shaw. The Mendips are full of caves, you know. Cheddar and Wookey aren't very far away. Some of the caves are sealed, inaccessible. Every now and again people penetrate a little farther into old ones, or find new ones. This one I happened to find myself."

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"Bang under the house!"

"Hoskin and I found it four years ago," said old McFarnel. "We were sinking a shaft for—what the devil were we sinking it for?"

"Would it be the time you were going to alter the inclination of the earth's axis?" suggested Jerry. "To abolish the seasons, you know—"

"I suppose it was. A crazy idea. But we all have our blind spots, don't we? Even Homer nods."

"But are we going to have our coffee down here?" asked Maureen.

"Not exactly here, dear lady," said Mr. McFarnel. "I'll show you."

He produced a pocket torch and led the way across the cavern; through a second chamber, along a shingle bank beside a two foot stream sliding soundlessly through this underworld, and up a flight of natural steps glistening like wax. At the head of these stairs they came amazingly to a green painted door in a brick wall. The old man opened the door and led them into that angle of the chamber which had been bricked off.

It was partitioned into three small rooms by matchboard walls. In the first were utility pattern easy chairs, standing rather rockily on the cave floor; in the second two divan beds; in the third a paraffin cooker and a sink, to which there seemed to be no water supply. Electric light, however, was available in all rooms, the ceilings, side walls, and floors of which were the confines of the cave.

"Even for you, Mr. McFarnel," said Jerry, "this is really incredible. How did you get permission and labour for this sort of building?"

"I'm afraid we dispensed with licences. We did this all ourselves, and the lift. About eighteen months' work. Not bad for two old men, is it?"

"It's incredible . . . But *why?*"

Hoskin came in with the coffee. He sat down quite confidently with the others. He was a servant in the house, but in the cave he was very nearly an equal partner.

"I suppose it's a sort of an air raid shelter," said Maureen. "Is it?"

"In a way, yes."

"Gently, now," said Hoskin. "Break it gently."

"I will," said his employer. Then he said, in quite a conversational tone, "You see—I am Noah."

"Not Napoleon?" asked Maureen. "Not Napoleon wanting a cocked hat?"

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" This is an air raid shelter, in the same way that Noah's Ark was just a ship. This is my ark. When I came upon the cave, you see, I suspected a Higher Purpose. And since I've consulted the stars, I've proved it."

" So that's why you asked me to buy you a telescope," remarked Jerry.

" It's a large undertaking, however, being Noah. You really have no idea. We're having a lot of trouble about the stock, aren't we, Hoskin ? "

" Small stuff's all right. Dogs, cats, chickens. But how'd we get the big animals down the lift shaft ? And I rang up the circus people like you said, Mr. McFarnel, but it's no use. Pair of monkeys'd set you back fifty quid, and as for the rest . . . Well, guv'nor, than me there isn't a man don't complain less, but I tell you straight—lions, tigers and snakes the missus won't have, not at any price."

" We are only the tools of Providence," said McFarnel easily. " If we can't get certain species—or they're too big, or Mrs. Hoskin won't have them, then plainly Providence has doomed those species to extinction. We can't do anything about it."

" Mr. McFarnel," said Maureen, " you've surpassed yourself. But Noah had a boat—"

" This time, my dear lady, there won't be a flood. You know the state of the world as well as I. Physicists are playing with forces they don't in the least know how to control. And they will get *out* of control. Not after national alarms or declarations of war or any emergencies that might send people to shelter. It'll happen by accident. Suspected by none—except myself. Atomic fission and chain reaction, that will be the story. I shall be safe in my ark here, but even coal miners and deep sea divers will be destroyed. And everything else."

" I don't suppose Noah was half so comfortable," said Jerry. " Beds, chairs, even electric light. And I suppose you know when ? From the stars, I mean ? "

" Precisely. World politics will cease to have any meaning after five minutes past midnight on the night of April the fifteenth."

" About four months to live, then."

" Four months and ten days."

" And who's going to share this delightful little three room flat with you—Hoskin ? "

" Oh, that isn't for us. I've bought a timber building, weather boarded summerhouse, in sections. We'll put it up by the stream, where there's enough headroom, and the Hoskins and I shall be there. Oh, no—this elegant little flat is for much more important people.

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"Hoskin and I aren't young men any more. You see—the human race must survive. That's the principal object in having Noahs at all. The question was—who was worthy of ensuring that survival? I didn't propose to scour the world with a tape measure and a set of intelligence tests, looking for the best. I didn't need to. I knew I would be guided."

"I'm not sure," said Jerry, "whether I quite get your meaning."

The old man beamed his beamiest; benevolence spread like a radiation from his pink and genial countenance; he took up a spoon, and held it poised like a conductor's baton.

"I was guided," he said. "I can only admire and applaud the choice of Providence. Miss Howe will be in every way a worthy mother of the human race, and you yourself, Mr. Shaw, have a natural nobility of temper which will supply the—"

"Now that," said Jerry, getting to his feet, "that is enough."

He looked angry, but, despite herself, Maureen could not repress a faint giggle. The old man was as bland as ever, but a peculiar dull blush slowly diffused itself over Hoskin's old and wrinkled cheeks. The girl no longer felt afraid; it was Jerry who was tight lipped and anxious.

"McFarnel," he said, "this is too much. I don't mind building sixty foot motor roads on the rings of Saturn, or travelling faster than light so that I can have a look at yesterday. But when it comes to being Adam, I quit. I particularly resent your insulting Miss Howe in this way, too. If you think we're going to populate your brave new world just to oblige you—you're wrong."

"Oh, but you will," said the old man. "Oh, yes, you will."

"Will we?" said Jerry. "Then I suppose it's only a matter of seconds before you two maniacs produce a couple of submachine guns and stand us off while you lock us up in your patent love-nest. And then after a few days you forget about Noah's Ark, have some other brainstorm, and forget to push the porridge under the door. Come on, Miss Howe, let's get out while we're safe and before any more new ideas come up."

"I don't think we're really in any danger," she said, somehow feeling sure of it.

"Of course not," her host said. "My dear Mr. Shaw, please sit down. I wouldn't attempt to use any forcible persuasion, even if I could. But, all the same, I feel confident you will do what I ask."

"Like the devil we will!"

"But I ask so little," said the old man. "Listen. I try to be a friend to both of you, and for the best of reasons, because I am

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fond of you. I can tell you now—because it will hardly matter any more—about my will, under which you three good people here will divide equally whatever I die possessed of. I mention it, perhaps a little unfairly, to suggest that you might perhaps feel inclined to fall in with an old man's whims, out of—friendliness and gratitude."

"But not," said Jerry hotly, "to the extent of—"

"Oh, dear me, no," said McFarnel. "I ask of you a much lesser thing. In the first place, please keep the secret of my cave. I think I can trust you. In the second place—if I ask you both down to Hill House for the night of the fifteenth of April, surely you wouldn't mind coming?

"And if I had a whim that we ought to sleep in the comfortable cave, rather than in the house, wouldn't you humour me? Oh, we should carefully observe the proprieties, I promise you; Miss Howe can sleep here with Mrs. Hoskin, and we three men will share the other hut."

"Now that's rather different," said Jerry.

"Not really," answered McFarnel. "You see, Mr. Shaw, by the morning of the sixteenth Miss Howe and yourself will be the only two young people alive in the world! I think I can leave the rest to nature."

Maureen could not restrain her laughter, and this made Hoskin, who thought it vaguely indecent, look shocked.

"I trust, Miss Howe," said Jerry, "you won't hold it against me that the first time we met it was at once proposed that you should be the mother of my children."

"I'll try to overlook it."

"I'm afraid," he said, "you might develop a prejudice against me, but it wasn't really my fault. I didn't have any idea—"

"Well, now that you know, Mr. Shaw," she said, "remember your responsibilities. Be careful crossing the road and read the Highway Code. The man I feel really sorry for is Hoskin. It's going to be awkward getting them all in two by two, particularly the elephants."

Hoskin cast a gloomy glance through the open door into the shadows of the cave.

"'S'only fit for growing mushrooms," he said.

"Mushrooms?" repeated the old man, musingly.

A few minutes later they went back to the lift shaft, and up again into the house.

The fact that Maureen Howe became Maureen Shaw on the twelfth of April that year was, of course, directly due to Mr. McFarnel's introductions, since otherwise they might not have met.

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Maureen had barely re-entered her office on her return from Somerset when the telephone rang.

A vaguely familiar voice said, "Is that the Mother of the Human Race? This is Poppa. Could we possibly dine and dance tonight, or tomorrow—do you think—in a friendly sort of way? I mean, in view of our responsibilities, don't you think we ought to know each other better?"

"Ah," she said, "you pursue me, do you? And in a few months' time you won't have any choice."

"That's why I want to see you," he said, "while there's still someone else to compare you with."

And she did, of course, survive all comparisons. So that eventually one evening in a honeymoon hotel they were jointly trying to make a slightly bewildered telephone operator understand the text of a telegram they wished to send, addressed to McFarnel, at Hill House, Bilberry-sub-Mendip.

"Now, message begins," said Jerry:

"*Future Human Race Assured stop Nature taking its course stop Prepare cave regardless of propriety stop Happy New Flood stop*

Mr. and Mrs. Shaw."

"And I shall be the first bride," said Maureen, "who spent part of her honeymoon in the bowels of the earth."

But she wasn't.

Mr. McFarnel was in his shirt sleeves in his cave putting bricks of mushroom spawn into banks of stable manure when Hoskin came down in the lift and gave him the telegram.

He was a very busy man, now, McFarnel. He had that very week founded two new enterprises which were, in conjunction, to give the world a new food fad.

The first was the *Society of Fungivorists*. Vegetarianism, claimed McFarnel, had been a step in the right direction; but the complete answer, which would confer longevity on the human race, was Fungus Eating. Not merely the eating of truffles and mushrooms, but of a whole range of peculiar species which McFarnel was already cultivating or proposed to breed, ranging in colour, size, flavour, and shape, to constitute a wholesome, appetizing and variegating diet.

The second enterprise, linked with the first, was *Mendip Mycophagists Limited*, which would shortly market the first crop of its prosperous career.

"You've done it now, guv," said Hoskin, after his master had

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shown him the telegram. "You told 'em to, so they did."

"Oh, no, Hoskin. They were bound to."

"You'll have to tell 'em about the Ark and all that, anyway."

"I suppose I shall. I'm afraid it *was* rather a . . ."

"I agree, sir. Than that a crazier set-up never got blue printed."

"We all have our blind spots, Hoskins."

"I know, guv. Homer nods."

The old man wrote an answer in his notebook, tore out the page and gave it to Hoskin to send:

Come Down by all Means. Cave Uninhabitable however. Disaster now unlikely. Regret I mistook Nova in Orion for Planet Neptune. Correction shows date should be April 15, Twenty nine thousand and fifty one B.C. But agree about Human Race. Congratulations.

"Send that," he said. "Then warn your wife they may be coming. Ring up the printers and shake 'em up about that order for letterheads, and tell *Joseph's* I've decided to buy that three hundredweight van. You find out if those wicker crates are ready. Oh—and if that young engineer from *Frost's* comes along here to make that survey, send him straight down."

"Big business," said Hoskin. "Now we're travelling!"

They were. Old McFarnel was, in the upshot, so busily occupied for so long with his two lucrative enterprises that he never thereafter appeared to lapse into certifiability.

As for the human race, the first of the supermen was born exactly eighteen months later, and weighed nine pounds six ounces.

* * *

NO HARM DONE

Whistler, the famous artist, once invited Mark Twain to visit his studio to see a new painting he was just finishing.

The humorist examined the canvas for some time in silence, then said: "I'd do away with that cloud if I were you," and extended his hand carelessly towards one corner of the picture.

Whistler cried out nervously, "Gad, sir, be careful! Don't you see the paint is still wet?"

"Oh, that doesn't matter," said Twain. "I've got my gloves on."

Art World

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DAY OF THESE DAYS

SUCH a morning it is when love
leans through geranium windows
and calls with a cockerel's tongue.

When red-haired girls scamper like roses
over the rain-green grass,
and the sun drips honey.

When hedgerows grow venerable,
berries dry black as blood,
and holes suck in their bees.

Such a morning it is when mice
run whispering from the church,
dragging dropped ears of harvest.

When the partridge draws back his spring
and shoots like a buzzing arrow
over grained and mahogany fields.

When no table is bare,
and no breast dry,
and the tramp feeds off ribs of rabbit.

Such a day it is when time
piles up the hills like pumpkins,
and the streams run golden.

When all men smell good,
and the cheeks of girls
are as baked bread to the mouth.

As bread and beanflowers
the touch of their lips,
and their white teeth sweeter than cucumbers.

LAURIE LEE

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THERE'S ROSEMARY, THERE'S RUE

It was the most natural thing in the world

by HUGH FALKUS

THE sunlight slanting across the eighteenth century façade of the *Theatre Royal* found its way rather sadly through the dusty panes of Mr. Napoleon Barr's office ; a Holy of Holies, high above the point where Shaftesbury Avenue flows into Piccadilly Circus.

Mr. Barr breathed out expensive smoke and smiled benignly at Julian Verlayne sitting hunched in a leather armchair by the fire.

" You can do your own casting, Julian, have anybody you want, don't worry about that. I'll have Descarde design the set. New costumes from Frankes. We'll give 'em a Hamlet like they've never seen before. A slap up production that'll pack 'em in with advance bookings for six months."

" Um . . ." said Julian, doubtfully.

" I tell you we can't go wrong," went on Mr. Barr with increasing eloquence. " It's a cinch. An absolute certain cast iron cinch. They haven't seen you for four years—not since you went to America—they're crying out for you. I tell you they'll just lap you up."

" Hmm . . ." said Julian again. But Mr. Barr was in full spate. " Listen. I've been in show business for forty five years and if anyone was to try and tell me that Shakespeare was commercial I'd tell him he was nuts. But not with Julian Verlayne playing Hamlet. Why, with you, it'll be the biggest draw in Town."

Julian shook his head reluctantly. " Boney, it's no good. I'm too old for the part now, and you know it."

" Nonsense," said Napoleon Barr.

" No, it isn't." Julian raised his eyes from contemplation of the thick pile carpet and smiled sympathetically at the little impresario who overflowed on all sides from his swivel chair behind the vast polished desk. " Respect the author's memory, my friend, and get someone younger."

" Damn the author," said Mr. Barr succinctly. " He's one of the few I don't have to worry about. But instead of that I have to worry about *you*. Though *why* I should have to worry about you Heaven only knows ! " He waved towards the poster covered walls. " Look

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there, my boy. You've done it before : Julian Verlayne as Hamlet, nineteen thirty. Julian Verlayne as The Prince, nineteen thirty five. Go on, look at 'em, it'll do you good. London and New York, nineteen thirty eight . . . Production of the year, *Theatre Royal*, nineteen forty six . . . Look at those notices. You've had 'em at your feet for twenty years, and still got 'em there. We can make this show the social do of the season . . . and you sit there worrying about your age ! " He leaned forward across the desk, his eyes popping, like a small round fish that has been dragged up from too great a depth. " What are *you* worrying about ? I'm the one who ought to be worrying—*if* there was anything to worry about, which there isn't . . . And how many shows do I put on that I don't give myself ulcers worrying about ? But now you have to go all high and flighty and say you don't want to play." Napoleon Barr's voice subsided in unhappy deflation.

Julian got up and wandered over to the window.

" I don't know, Boney, I don't know." He stood there looking down at the busy whirlpool of Piccadilly, thinking of another day in that office when Boney had given him his first big chance, twenty years ago. A burning eyed young actor of twenty six who'd come up the hard way from the provinces, starving in his hopeless struggle to break open the iron ring of the West End stage. It was going to be hard to refuse Napoleon Barr . . . and yet—Julian swung round and faced him.

" Listen, Boney. I'm going to be perfectly frank. Of course I want to play Hamlet again. I suppose I'll want to go on playing it until I'm seventy—but I don't want to let you down. I don't know whether I'm as good as I was, and even to be as good as *that* isn't good enough. I've got to be a great deal better and I'm not convinced I can do it. So far as Hamlet's concerned, I'm an old man."

Mr. Barr dismissed the passage of time with an extravagant gesture. " You're forty six, Julian. Thirty eight to the public—and don't look more than thirty on the stage. Age doesn't matter, my boy. All that does matter is . . . is . . . Well, I mean to say, it's . . . it's . . ." In search of inspiration, his eyes ranged quickly from a portrait of Sir Henry Irving, dressed as Macbeth, to a blonde wearing little except long hair and surrounded almost entirely by balloons . . .

She seemed to bring results, for he brought his stubby white hands down with a crash on the desk.

" A new approach, that's it ! " breathed Mr. Barr triumphantly. " A new approach, that's what we want. A completely new angle on the play." He got up and waddled round to the front of the desk.

" Listen. I'm taking the present show off in about three months so we've got just nice time. What do you say, eh ? "

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Julian knew very well what he should say; but rather to his astonishment heard himself saying exactly the opposite. It was almost as though someone else was saying it for him.

Napoleon Barr reached up on tiptoe and clapped him affectionately on the shoulder. "That's the spirit, my boy, that's my Julian. I knew you'd see it the right way. That's great. Now I can go right ahead with plans." He rubbed his hands enthusiastically.

"Between us we'll make this production something for history to talk about. Tell you what, I'll get on with advance publicity right away—In fact, I'll get some of the Press boys up here tomorrow morning . . . Don't worry," he went on hastily. "No need for you to be here, I'll handle everything."

He steered Julian to the door and escorted him towards the lift. "You're not to worry about *anything*. Just get down to this Abbey place you were telling me about, concentrate on a new approach to the play—you understand—and leave all the rest to me."

Wychhe Abbey was built originally by a prosperous Baron in eleven ninety two. Henry the Eighth knocked most of it down in fifteen thirty four. Thirty years later Sir Richard Basingstoke put it together again. Then the Roundheads had a go; but one of Charles the Second's favourites rebuilt it and installed his mistress there. Apart from a mysterious outbreak of fire in the eighteenth century, it remained much the same until a Zeppelin bomb reduced it by one wing during the first world war and a stray Doodle Bug caused further alteration to its outline in the second; but its solid walls endured, and the tall arched windows still look out across rolling Sussex downs to the level smudge of Channel fifteen miles away.

Julian, thinking grimly about his new approach, sat in the library with the cares of production spread out across the table in front of him. He realized with great clarity that he was totally without inspiration. It was all very well for Boney to talk abstractedly of a new approach—where the devil did he think it was going to come from? Julian sighed and leaned forward with his elbows on the table, concentrating once more on his unfinished cast list.

Basil Vascoign as Claudius; Gretchen Hassal as Gertrude. Not much to worry about there. Anthony Green as Polonius; Bernard Fell, Horatio. No one better in the parts. Howard Briggs as the Player King. Splendid. Plenty of good blood there—plenty of ham. Julian liked ham. Ham, he thought as he read on, should never be far beneath the surface . . . Ophelia; the Gravediggers; Marcellus and so on. No trouble there—most of them had played with him before. Lærtes? Well, there was the choice of several. Young Emmerton perhaps, or Vernon Clancy who'd done so well with the

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Old Vic last year . . . Rosencrantz and Guildenstern . . . Osric . . . His eyes continued down the list until, at the very bottom, heavily underlined, he came to the word *Ghost*. There was a blank space opposite with several question marks. Julian eyed it unhappily. Who the dickens was he going to get to play the Ghost ?

He sat back in his chair and began to think about it. Who *could* play it ? He thought back carefully over many performances. No one that he could remember had ever given the part just that tone of unearthly quality it required. No one had conjured up that essential lightness of touch ; that ethereal quality of voice ; that strange suspension between two worlds. Wearily, Julian realized there wasn't anyone who could play it as he wanted—there never had been. Perhaps it was an impossible part to play. How *could* anyone play a ghost ? And equally, how could a weary, greying, middle aged actor-producer hope to throw new light on Hamlet ?

Glumly, he pushed back his chair and looked round at the shadowy book-filled shelves. A most imposing collection. In little patches the late afternoon light touched out their snug leather bindings with a rich tinge of blood . . . Histories of the Theatre ; The Elizabethan Stage ; Lighting ; Costume ; Editions of Shakespeare . . . Gordon Craig ; Granville Barker ; Dover Wilson ; Verity ; Coleridge . . . everyone else who had ever written anything worth writing on the Theatre . . . Volumes on Garrick ; Irving ; Kean ; Betterton ; Macready ; Forbes-Robertson . . . every great actor of the past was there. Everything—everyone. He knew them all . . . And what could he do that they hadn't done ? What could he do now that he himself in four productions, with all the fire and enthusiasm of youth, hadn't already tried ? He felt suddenly very tired and dispirited. He got up and moved over to the open windows.

Leaves were drifting slowly from branches etched in fine tracery against the evening sky. To the west, purple clouds banked high against a flame streaked sunset. The air was utterly quiet and still; even a belated rook flying, solitary, home, passed by in silence. The eerie whirr of a bat's wings flickering past sounded unnaturally loud for a moment : then it too was gone and the quiet was absolute.

The fires of evening began to fade ; the clouds reached up to a mantle of green and grey. Absorbed in the stillness, Julian stood leaning against the frame of the window watching the last embers of sunset and thinking about the Ghost of Hamlet's father.

My hour is almost come,
When I to sulphurous and tormenting flames
Must render up myself.

The room filled with the soft resonance of his voice as he spoke :

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I am thy father's spirit ;
Doom'd for a certain term to walk the night,
And, for the day, confin'd to fast in fires
Till the foul crimes done in my days of nature
Are burnt and purg'd away. But that I . . .

He broke off suddenly as a strange voice behind him said, " Oh no, my dear fellow ; oh dear me, no. It's not like that at all."

Julian turned and stared into the room. From the dim shadows by the bookshelves emerged the misty figure of a little man. He had a round white face ; big brown eyes ; a pointed nose ; long dark hair and a sensitive, humorous mouth. Less a man than an impression of a man.

For some peculiar reason, Julian was not conscious of any great feeling of surprise. It was almost as though he had expected him. Somehow in that shadowy twilight it seemed the most natural thing in the world for a ghost to materialize suddenly at his elbow. What made his heart quicken and his lungs come near to bursting with held breath was the stranger's voice. It was a low, vibrant, unearthly voice which seemed to come over a great distance from the very depths of time.

" Oh no," the little man was saying, " those lines shouldn't be spoken like that at all. I've been to every production of Hamlet ever staged, and it's always worried me that no one has *ever* spoken them properly."

He waved a misty arm towards the bookshelves.

" Garrick ; Irving ; Kean ; Macready ; I've seen them all—even the incomparable Burbage. I know all their little tricks and fancies. Everybody who ever played in Hamlet."

He turned confidentially towards Julian and smiled.

" I've seen you, of course, and I thought you were very good—and I've seen lots of other fine Hamlets and Horatios and Kings and Queens and Ophelias and so on, but, strangely enough, I've never seen anyone play the part of the Ghost as it should be played."

There was a sudden silence. Julian moved across to the table.

" Come and sit down," he said. " Come and sit down . . . I'd like to hear more . . . You say you saw Burbage play Hamlet ? "

" Oh, yes," said the little man happily. " I was there on the first night. It was most exciting, and gratifying. Of course, I don't think the audience quite got hold of the play, but Burbage was magnificent and they all enjoyed it. In fact, it went down very well. We even got some of the crowd away from the Bear-Baiting on the second night and it played to very good business—considering there were seventeen public executions that week. Mind you, it was—er—rather different from the script you play now, but that

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doesn't really matter. No one worries about that in the audience—only the professors in their stuffy libraries, and they don't matter at all. No, the play's the thing you know, up there on the boards, with the make-up and the lights and the smell of the theatre . . ."

The little man paused and sighed rapturously.

" Oh, I can't tell you," he went on, " how happy I am to be able to *talk* to somebody about the theatre at last. I've longed and longed to be able to talk aloud ; to *materiålize* and *be* someone. I've tried for so long—and then suddenly, just this moment, after all these years, it *happened*."

The little man stopped with an ecstatic exhalation of breath and sat looking at Julian with his large soft brown eyes twinkling merrily.

" Er—may I be allowed to know who you are . . . Or perhaps I should ask—" Julian corrected himself courteously, " whom you have become ? "

" Oh, that doesn't matter." The little man bounced up and down excitedly. " It doesn't matter who I am. Call me the Spirit of the Theatre if you like—call me anything, I don't mind and it's really of no importance. The point is that I'm here. Actually sitting here in the flesh—er—that is to say, *almost*.

" You see," he explained quickly, " I knew you were down here, that's why I've come. I was in the office when Napoleon Barr was asking you to play the part—and I was so afraid you were going to refuse. And then, when you said you *would* play Hamlet after all I was *so* happy, because you are the greatest Hamlet alive and this next production of yours will be your greatest."

" But I can't think what to do," said Julian unhappily. His voice seemed to come from a long way off. He felt rather like a small boy again, with a Christmas party coming up and no party piece.

" At least," he went on, " I don't know what to do that I haven't done already."

" Oh, but *I* do," said the little man happily. "That's why I'm here. I know just what we're going to do."

" *We* ? " queried Julian.

" Yes, of course . . . Can't you guess ? "

Julian leaned forward in his chair staring straight in front of him into those humorous brown eyes . . . Yes, he knew all right. He'd known from the moment when he turned from the window to see the little brown man behind him . . .

" You mean you—you'd play the part of the Ghost yourself ? "

The little man gave a great sigh of pleasure.

" I'd love to," he breathed happily. " That is, if you'll let me. It's something I've always wanted to do. Something I've dreamed about."

He waggled his head and gave a little bounce of pleasure.

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"But I want to do more than that," he said quickly. "I told you I'd come here to try to help you." He leaned across and came very close to Julian's staring eyes.

"I was—er—there when the play was written," he whispered. "I know just what the author meant in the Nunnery scene . . . I know how the Dram of eale got so distorted, and what it means . . ."

His great brown eyes were soft in the half light—almost pleading.

"Don't you think I *might* be able to help you?"

Julian took a deep breath. He reached slowly out and drew the script towards him and opened it at the beginning . . .

There was a respectful knock on the door of Julian's dressing room. "Ten minutes, Mr. Verlayne."

Julian began to dab make-up on his face. He used the same divisioned cigar box he had used in Repertory twenty seven years ago. He put a number of dots on his face and then a series of lines. He always put it on that way, enjoying the effect of a jaundiced zebra before smoothing it over and stroking it into an even mask.

The little brown eyed man was perched on the edge of the settee watching him. "How do you feel?" he asked.

"Terrible," answered Julian truthfully. "There's a huge knot in my stomach, I can't breath properly and I feel sick."

The little man nodded sympathetically. "Most of them felt like that. All except Burbage. Nothing ever seemed to worry him. He'd stand there on a first night waiting for his call with a tankard of ale in his hand . . ."

He broke off as there was a shout from the corridor: "Overture. Beginners please."

"Well," said Julian. "This is it!" He stopped patting in powder and turned towards his Ghost. "Good luck."

"Thank you," said the little man, getting to his feet. "And good luck to you . . . Remember, you're not to worry. We know exactly what we've got to do, and I promise you, tonight's will be the greatest performance of your life."

The voice from the corridor shouted: "Act One. Beginners please . . . Beginners please . . ."

"You're first," said Julian.

"As if I didn't know," smiled the little man and vanished through the dressing room door.

Julian tried to relax, there was a pulse beating inside his head. He'd got a few minutes yet—there was the first scene to play. He lay back and thought about the Ghost. No one had seen him yet; even at the dress rehearsals an understudy had walked the part and spoken the lines. No one had dared question his decision to rehearse the Ghost privately.

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Julian smiled. The critics were in for a surprise, he thought. So were Horatio and Marcellus and Co.; for the first time in history they would see the part played by someone qualified to play it. He chuckled aloud and glanced at the clock. Time he was getting aloft.

On the side of the stage, amongst his flats and drapes and curtains, Julian felt his tiredness ebb and a surge of excitement flow in his blood. His producer's cloak of responsibility had gone. There was nothing more he could do now—except get out there on the boards and play his heart out.

His first scene with the Ghost was a sensation.

Lying on the battlements, watching his father's spirit floating in the night sky with a cloak of mist about its shoulders, listening to that unbelievable blood-chilling voice, Julian felt the spiral of fear creeping down his spine. The audience sat spellbound, silent.

And then for one awful moment they came very near to disaster. When the cock crowed off-stage as the Ghost got to that bit about the Glow-worm paling his uneffectual fire, the little man wavered and seemed almost to dissolve. Julian, sweating on the battlements, gazed up-stage, cursing the effects man. It was taking realism too far when you deceived even a Ghost. It was a very near thing, but the little man checked himself just in time and the last line, spoken with haunting beauty and pathos as he drifted away into the dawn, seemed to come from beyond the sunrise . . . The house rose in thunderous applause.

Backstage Horatio glanced at Hamlet's pale, drawn face with a look of frank admiration and amazement.

"Julian, that Ghost scene was magnificent. I've never known it played like that." He smiled. "For a moment I almost thought . . ."

Everyone played above themselves that night. The cast worked as if inspired, and the atmosphere in the house was electric. Towards the end of Act Three, Julian—strung to his highest pitch—realized they could do no wrong. He had reason to be glad of it, for as the Ghost made its final exit to Hamlet's heart searching line: "*Look, where he goes, even now, out at the portal!*" the little man so far forgot himself that he missed the portal and wandered off straight through the castle wall!

"Overacting!" muttered the nerve strained Julian grimly.

When the final curtain fell there was a silence in the auditorium for almost thirty seconds . . . then the entire house rose to its feet with the greatest ovation in theatre history—and began to move down towards the stage . . .

The clock in the hall chimed ten.

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Benson placed the coffee tray on the bedside table and arranged the daily papers in order of precedence.

Julian stretched luxuriously and opened one eye. Benson was hovering solicitously in the doorway.

"I have brought up the coffee and papers, sir, and switched on the electric fire." He coughed. "If I may presume, sir, I should like to extend my warmest congratulations on your performance last night. It was splendid, sir, simply splendid. A magnificent production and, in my humble opinion, your finest rendering of the part. A view, which—if I may say so, sir—is shared enthusiastically by the Press."

He bent slightly towards the bed.

"In the vernacular, sir, you've knocked 'em cold!"

Julian put out a hand for some coffee and the first of the newspapers—then opened his eyes fully. Sitting on the end of the bed, rubbing his hands together and gently bouncing up and down, was the little brown man.

"Good morning," said Julian, passing a hand across his eyes. "How do you feel?"

"Wonderful," sighed the little man rapturously. "I expect you're feeling tired, but then you haven't seen the notices yet. They're sensational."

Julian sipped his coffee and began to read slowly through the first notice. "Sensational" was certainly not an overstatement. As Benson had said, they'd knocked 'em cold!

He finished the first paragraph and closed his eyes for a moment in a sheer glow of happiness and pride. He'd got away with it. Nothing he'd ever done in the past twenty years had produced a Press notice like this. Boney would be in a seventh heaven of delight. Well, he deserved to be, though he little realized to whom the credit really belonged.

Julian lay there wondering whether he ought to tell Boney—whether he'd understand . . . He opened his eyes and smiled at the little figure on the end of the bed with great tenderness and affection. He blinked as he felt his eyes moisten, sipped more coffee and began to read on down the column . . .

Suddenly, every muscle in his body went taut. His cup lowered slowly as he stared with rigid incredulity at the paper. Coffee spilled as the cup rattled into the saucer—but Julian sat motionless . . . staring . . .

For the third time, he read slowly word by word through the last sentence in the paragraph:

"*In a production of such originality and brilliance, it was a fitting touch of genius for Hamlet to speak the Ghost's lines himself . . .*"

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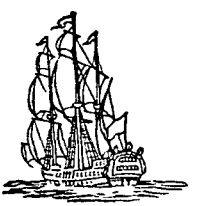
He remained staring at the page until the print blurred. The clock on the dressing-table ticked steadily and loudly . . . He was afraid to move . . . afraid to look up . . .

Then, with a great effort of will, he lowered the paper and slowly lifted his eyes to the foot of the bed . . . And the little man was still sitting there, smiling at him.

* * *

GOOD TIDINGS



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SHARK BAIT

Dare he risk it? More imperatively, dare he not?

by DOROTHY COTTRELL

THE sea rolled in strongly in the sunset but the wind had dropped as Dr. John Perry worked his way back along the sandspit towards the submerged sand-bridge that connected the spit with the next reef. A mile to the west, the island where he had left his boat stood up darkly, and some ten miles further west, a purplish line topped by rosy dust haze marked the mainland of Australia.

The doctor, a big and heavily bronzed young man whose sandy hair seemed almost bleached in contrast to his skin, moved easily through the flaming light, feeling the combined glow of sunburn, a perfect day and the knowledge of several fine specimens in the shell bag over his shoulder.

All things in the day had been good with sea and solitude, but there were high spots; the pool in which there were four crimson anemones and one large lilac anemone like a living chrysanthemum about which three small silver fish with pink spots played recklessly.

And then the hole in the rocks through which he had been able to look down into the submarine cathedral of the channel where the light rays fell in blue glory that deepened with distance to purple.

There were the booming thunder, furious wind and leaden rain of the afternoon storm and the perfect paper nautilus that the storm had flung up.

The water of the channel was crimson and purple and the distant shape of the island had turned to wine as he reached the point at which he had crossed the sand-bridge that morning, and beyond the channel the exposed reefs lay like fields of wilted lilac sponge blotted with the bloody flame of a myriad pools.

Getting a better grip on his shell bag and his light fish grain, he waded in confidently—only to have his feet shoot from under him down a precipitate and sandy cliff. Even his kicking toes could not reach bottom as his head went under. He came up blowing and felt the strong impact of water surging towards him from

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something that moved violently beneath the surface, and a great pulse of sandy water burst up about him.

Instinctively and with his heart pounding, he flung himself back to the sandspit and scrabbled up its sliding and snowy surface. Then he turned to look into the darkening water and his hair crawled. The great dorsal fin of a shark was lazily cutting ripples away from the edge of the sand, the dimly seen barrel was like that of a draft horse and the paler under-surfaces gleamed evilly as it tipped in turning. To the doctor, it looked as big as a submarine and he must almost have stepped on it as he had plummeted down!

Believing that he must have missed the right place for the sand-bridge, he rechecked his position. No. He had been right. There was the stunted bunch of silver weeds with the conch shell beside it that he had fixed on as a marker if he should get back to the channel at dusk. Apparently the sand-bridge had been swept away by some freak of the in-piling sea during the storm. The problem now was how much of it was gone?

The storm-disturbed water was clearing quickly and the last diffused amber of afterglow sank into it without revealing bottom. Yes! Now he could see the sand floor deep below, but it lay at a depth of at least twenty feet and, as he looked, the enormous shapes of three sharks drowsed above it.

Now that he belatedly remembered it he had been told of how the shallow seas, driving in during storm, turned the channels to mill races and swept away sand formations or created new ones. These inner waters of the Great Barrier Reef had been his delight since he had come to this remote section of Queensland, but evidently he still had a lot to learn about them. Nor did he know as much about sharks as he could have wished. For instance, did they attack at night? Or would it presently be safe for him to plunge across the hundred-yard width of the channel?

The horribly mutilated bathers that he had seen dragged on to Australian beaches had all been attacked in daylight, but perhaps that was because the Australian national sport of surf riding was conducted in daylight. And since sharks hunted by smell it seemed reasonable that they would attack in darkness. He even seemed to remember reading of a ship sunk off the Barrier Reef during the war where the survivors had been hunted through the night by sharks. Certainly, for want of better knowledge, he would do well to stay where he was until morning.

Starry darkness came, warm wind drifted in from the Coral Sea to the east, and he was aware of the soft murmur of the sea all about him. Sitting on the snow of powdered coral that formed the ridge of the sandspit, he considered what he would do if the

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sharks had not gone in the morning. There was nothing on the sandspit with which he could build a raft and his matches had become wet in the storm so that he could not light a signal fire. Even so, it was practically certain that he would be sighted from the air or from a passing boat before he was in serious trouble for food or water.

Half the sea things were edible and this was the season of showers. Nor would the sharks stay there forever. Sooner or later, by picking his time, he could risk a race across the channel . . . But he could not wait to be sighted or pick his time! Several of his patients—and particularly the girl—would need him.

This was not a district in which a second doctor could be called if the first were not available. If he was stuck on the reef, there was no doctor who could be called, and if the girl's time should come earlier than he had expected and she died for lack of attention, he would be very definitely responsible for it.

She had sat before him, small and neat and tanned and very stubborn. He had smiled at her and said, "You want to have the baby."

Her husband, he knew, had broken a worthless neck in a drunken driving accident, leaving her penniless and with child, but she had set herself up as a seamstress. And now she had come to the doctor's office to tell him that a specialist whom she had visited in the city had advised her not to have the child as her delivery would be a very dangerous one. Her sun-faded hair swung to her shoulders in a long bob and she looked almost a child herself, but she regarded him quietly and answered, "I'm going to have it."

He had laughed and said, "Well, we'll see . . ." At the end of his examination, he told her sincerely, "It will be a risk, but I think we can get you through all right."

She stood up and said, "Thank you."

He told her, "Don't be frightened or start worrying. That's bad for you."

She said promptly, "I'm not frightened. I have complete confidence in you."

It was said without effusion and she meant it. To betray the confidence would be the most horrible thing that could ever happen to him.

He was up as the first blue light rimmed the seas to the east but while the darker blue of night still held the sandspit and the channel. The dawn wind that preceded the sun was fresh and delightfully cold and, to the doctor, his anxieties of the night seemed foolish. He felt confident that full light would reveal the channel free of

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sharks, and that in a few minutes he would be safely on his way to his boat.

Slowly, the high island to the west, where the boat lay, caught a flush of rose and the indigo twilight lessened on the sea's face and the sand.

He was acutely hungry and the thought of the biscuits, butter and corned beef in the boat made his mouth water. There were also matches, coffee and condensed milk in the boat locker and he would make a small fire on the beach of the cove and treat himself to a cup of coffee before he headed back for the settlement. His mind pictured the thick, sweet condensed milk sinking like creamy snakes into the rich brown clarity of the coffee and then the pleasantness of stirring the drink and burning his lips a little with the first sip.

His stomach was tormented by even the slight delay before he would be able to taste the coffee!

A constant, frothy stirring accompanied by sounds as of showered raindrops came from the channel and at moments there were heavier splashes and staccato slaps; the whole suggesting violent and unseen activity. Then the silken surface of the sea became uncertainly visible, gathered the increasing light, and ran before him in sharp detail.

A swirling lace of foam eddied where the sand-bridge had once been, apparently marking the meeting of two currents, and the water boiled and leaped with fish, while through the mêlée, seeming large as the keels of small sail boats, cruised the great dorsal fins of five sharks.

The foam was pink with sunrise and also, he thought, stained with blood, and the huge fins had a cast of purplish rose. About the rushing fish and the gliding sharks the water boiled with sand and debris and the whole scene had the infernal fascination of a nightmare.

As a site for swimming it had a glorious inappropriateness that caused him to sit suddenly on a boulder and laugh until he lost his breath. When he controlled his laughter, he continued to sit on the grey rock and run his fingers through his faded hair. The sharks had not gone away and how long they might remain was beyond his knowledge. If he was to get off that sandspit and be sure of being in time to help the girl, he had to get off under his own steam.

But how?

His nearest approach to a weapon was the fish grain and the thought of assaulting the sharks with it was like planning to attack a battleship with a pocket-knife. He doubted if it would even puncture the leather of their hides and it would do no more than annoy them if it did.

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He stood up and gathered an assortment of rocks and lumps of brain coral. Then, standing at the edge of the channel, he took aim at the sharks. Several of the shots were near misses in which the sharks were interested, but two struck their mark, one hitting one of the great fins, another bouncing from an immense gliding back. The sharks shook themselves like dogs struck by raindrops but took no more notice than if the largest stones he could heave had been pebbles. If anything, they seemed entertained, for they swam closer to him so that he could see the great, pale eyes. He thought of dynamite—but he had no dynamite.

He tried throwing showers of smaller stones and the sharks thrashed, roiled and charged in the impression that the commotion was caused by jumping fish. The great bodies collided, rolled half out of the water, and became a thrashing frenzy but they did not go. He had heard that they disliked heavily clouded water and while the channel was already swirled with drifting sand, he threw armfulls of wet sand into it.

He could not possibly have thrown the sand far enough to clear a path of escape even had the sharks fled from the sinking snow clouds, but, in any case, they simply wallowed around in the sandy water, again seeming to believe that it betokened the presence of even more fish.

He sat down again, panting and sweating from his futile efforts. He felt the peaceful man's incredulity before the tangible presence of violence and death. Yet great sharks passed so close to him that he could see the strange, coarse texture of the skins and could count the barnacles and sucker fish that clung to them. He knew that to go into the channel would almost certainly be to die, yet he had an irrational desire to touch the passing and repassing sharks to see what they felt like. Would they feel cold or warm? Rubbery or hard?

He pressed his hands against his eyes, trying to remember all that he had ever heard of sharks. Beyond a general knowledge of which kinds were dangerous—and that it was better to give a wide berth to most kinds—he knew very little.

He opened his eyes and looked at the again lazily cruising monsters, and a slow grin twisted his mouth. At least he had a perfect opportunity to start learning now. It was his guess that he had most of the sharks from that section of the Barrier Reef right in his own bit of channel.

This brought another idea. The sharks were gathered there because the newly opened tideways that caused the conflict of currents also served as funnels for the legions of the fish, whose darting armies met where the sand-bridge had been and where the

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sharks patrolled. And while this was the natural point at which to cross to the next reef, since to north and south the sandspit and the reef drew apart, at no place was the channel more than a quarter of a mile wide.

He walked rapidly along the sandspit towards the south until he was perhaps a quarter of a mile from the narrows. The jade and amber water was clearer here and it seemed free of sharks. Dared he risk it? If he got halfway across—got anywhere too far from shore to get to shore fast—he could prove a tasty snack for the first shark to reach him.

He could hold no illusion that these sharks were going to be frightened off by any of the approved methods of splashing or shouting; that would simply be entertainment added to the shark's meal.

And there was something odd in the thought that, to the shark, eating him would have no more importance than the eating of a large fish. It would not know that it was swallowing education, dreams and the conscience of man.

There was, he saw, difficulty for man in breaking through human vanity to consider himself as so much bait and nothing more; as so much foodstuff, perhaps good, perhaps inferior!

Resentment blazed through him. He thought, *Damn them! I'm damned if I'm going to be shark bait!*

Studying the channel, he calculated how long it would take him to get across. At this point, he would be in the water for from five to six minutes. But a great deal could happen in five or six minutes.

A little land breeze was ruffling the water and clouding its clearness and he wished that it was not. The water was less alarming when it was absolutely clear. Indeed, while one might know the danger, it was hard to picture oneself being torn to fragments in something like a section of fairyland set in a diamond.

Now the underwater world had the menace of things half seen. But even now it was hard to grasp what could happen. A man's body had an element of finish and security. It was difficult to believe in a leg chopped off, a belly torn out, a trunk severed through stomach, muscle and spinal column for easier swallowing. He thought of the sharks, *I'm scared as hell but I still don't quite believe them!*

He was very much alive at the moment and an attempt at crossing the channel could mean that in a few moments he was dead. On the other hand no one might see him for days or weeks; the sharks might stay for weeks and during that time the girl might die. Not that he would be much good to her if a shark bit him in two.

He decided to try it.

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But he had to try it carefully, must not try it needlessly. He looked quickly round the twin circles of sky and sea to make sure that no rescuing boat or plane was in sight. Sea and sky were utterly empty.

He pulled off his clothes, keeping only his belt and pocket knife; knowing the knife useless as a toothpick against the sharks but finding it comforting for all that.

Standing on a coral head, he surveyed the channel. Its rippled width seemed sharkless—but also wide. He hesitated between a running dive—that would get him off to a flying start but would also create a disturbance—or sliding cautiously into the water. He chose the soft entrance and walked slowly out into the warmth of the water. Because of the delicate riffle of the wind, he could see downward only directly beneath him. That would not do. He submerged his face and stared about the submarine world. All clear.

He was about to rise for breath and strike out boldly when he looked again to the north.

The great barrel of a shark had materialized, tremendous, dwarfing his own body, yet, through some trick of the water, seemingly airy and almost immaterial. It lay there, midway between surface and bottom, its greyness deep lilac against the Nile green of the tide, its lower body traced with dancing, golden refractions of light from the bottom.

With his heart beating like a triphammer, the doctor softly retraced his steps to the sand face, whirled and scrabbled up. If he had not taken that last look, he would have been too far from shore to get back and he wondered what the first sensation would have been?

First, doubtless, the strong and pulsing swirl of water that denotes the nearness of a living and swiftly moving body. Perhaps a body-crushing blow, with the impact of tons behind it, from the shark's blunt nose, the sharper pressure of teeth on back and belly, a second's splitting agony, the amazement of dismemberment—then the red dark.

More practically, whether through accident or because the shark had actually followed him, he was not going to get across the channel by moving down the sandspit.

He stood up and studied the sanspit. It was perhaps half a mile in total length and fifty feet wide, with a single rocky hump where he had sat during the storm.

At either end channels cut deeply towards the glitter and tumble of the Coral Sea, and somewhere across the eastern horizon was the tremendous bulk of the Barrier Reef itself. If the sharks were on the opposite—the seaward—side of the sandspit it would

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take them some time to get back to the channel; longer than it would take him to get across to the next reef.

He walked back to the point where the sand-bridge had been and where now the monsters wallowed in the fish filled tide rip. The wind had dropped and, either by chance or intent, the shark that had almost got him kept pace with him, a great shape beneath the tide. Then slowly it rose and the vast dorsal fin stood up like the keel of a sail boat. There was odd contrast between the solidity of the fin and the seeming translucence of the great barrel below the wash.

The sharks rolled playfully and fed upon the fish. He toyed with the possibility that they were so sated with food that they might not actually bother to attack him, but he dared not risk it. He had already seen them severing and slashing fish for pleasure when they could no longer eat. He reviewed again all that he had been told of sharks. They were said to have wonderful powers of scent so that a trail of blood would attract them through fathoms of water.

He had heard of men making a break across a shark patrolled channel by flinging an armful of crushed shellfish or chopped fish into the water at some distance from the point at which they wished to swim, and being across before the shark stopped nosing about the baited water.

If he had been dealing with one shark, or if the sharks had been hungry, he might have been able to work that. But he had counted five sharks, and they were operating in water that was actually faintly tinged with blood from their own feasting.

Still mashing the contents of his specimen bag, he trailed it from the end of the grain where the current set towards the sharks. And at last they noticed it.

Then instantly the blunt, ridiculous snouts turned towards it and with effortless speed the sharks shot up to investigate. And they were gathered like an aggregation of launches as he swung the bag clear.

He moved along the shore and again dipped the bag. But this time the monsters were less interested. One glided up, then turned away.

Their speed also was most disconcerting, since they could use it in returning from the far side of the sandspit even if he got them there.

To be sure of getting across that channel, he would have to get all the sharks to the centre of the opposite side of the sandspit and, if possible, keep them interested there. He had heard, he believed accurately, that they were attracted by the novelty of warm blood

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And once he had seen an accident on one of the cattle boats where a terrified steer plunged overboard. The sharks had torn the beast to pieces and had continued to thrash through the reddened water in a kind of frenzy.

It was also said that a man swimming with even a small, bleeding cut was in great danger.

The doctor scrubbed his knife in the sand, then pricked the tip of his finger, grimacing at the memory of the times he had assured a patient that it was not going to hurt. It did hurt badly, but it also bled well and he let his handkerchief redden to saturation before he checked the bleeding by pressure. He tied the handkerchief on the cord at the end of the grain and dipped it into the tide.

The effect was magical!

The sharks rolled, nosing, then roiled towards the reddened rag. He moved along the shore, trailing the handkerchief. The sharks followed him almost to the channel that led to the seaward side of the sandspit, but by this time the blood had washed from the handkerchief and the sharks broke away one by one and went nosing back towards the tide rip.

He had to have a longer lasting bait.

It was surprising how uninviting any location about his anatomy looked as the site of a substantial cut!

He chose the fleshy part of his thigh, cleaned the flesh with sand and polished the knife to a glitter, then made an incision from which the blood streamed in a red freshet. He soaked the handkerchief, his shirt and his shorts and a large sponge, then rolled them into a ball tied with fishline. The saturated bundle should at least hold its charm.

He used pressure on the cut in his thigh until the worst of the bleeding stopped, but knew that it would continue to bleed as he moved.

Then with the red bundle on the end of the grain pole, he began his baiting of the sharks.

Repeatedly he had them through to the outer side of the bar, but some perversity or uneasiness always sent one or two knifing back with the ripples trailing from the great dorsal fins. He had to re-open his wound and resaturate the bundle before he finally got all of them interestedly on the outer side of the sandspit. Then he placed the bait in water that was just too shallow for them to reach it, and as they nosed in the surge, he turned and ran as he had never run across the spit.

Still running, he gave a single glance at the channel which revealed no new or returning sharks. He hit the water on a flat

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dive and struck out as he had never swum, his head down, his arms swinging in the ugly but water-covering Australian crawl. He raised his face only to gasp for air and knew that he was covering distance.

He was perhaps halfway over when he glanced back. A shark's fin was knifing up the channel towards him.

He assumed that it belonged to a new shark since the others had always gone back round the northern end of the bar, and he had had some comfort from the fact that they would be up current from him.

This one was approaching from the south and he believed from its excited veering that it had already scented him. He dropped his face below water and swam, trying to keep his mind from the death that might be closing in on him. He could do nothing but trust his speed.

Looking back wouldn't help. But it was hard not to look—for the shark was real enough to him now. His straining belly felt horribly vulnerable and he pictured the lifting impact of the shark's vast nose striking it from below, flinging him upwards and sideways before the fatal bite.

He rose gasping again for air and saw the shore ten yards ahead. From behind him, he felt the surging impact of water that was not from the currents of his own swimming. He kicked in a wild crescendo of splashing.

A surge as of a veering submarine hit him, almost rolling him over in the water, and he touched the coral bank and tore his way up it, cutting his fingers to ribbons.

The shark had veered, momentarily disconcerted, but as he swung his feet clear, it struck the coral face and the coral shook. The shark had misjudged its distance and hit the reef in full charge. It roiled, thrashing, almost on its side, and he mentally apologized to the old seamen who had told of this experience and whose stories he had disbelieved.

The shark flailed, almost upside down, and then the other sharks were on it.

They converged in sharp, sideward charges, the great mouths with their teeth like pointed sledgehammer heads lifting from the water, and seeming quite theatrical in their hugeness.

The water turned red and he saw one shark tossing its blunt nose upwards with a chunk of flesh the size of a small barrel protruding from its jaws. The beleaguered shark was being eaten alive, stripped down to its skeletal structure while it still plunged, lashed and fought. Bloody water splashed over the doctor as he clung to the reef face.

"So it didn't turn out like you thought?" John Perry said.

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He stared down at the sharks with malevolent triumph. Then he climbed painfully up the coral as blood dripped down his leg until he had to press his hand against it.

Slowly he grinned. Perhaps the sharks had the last laugh.

He had come out all right—he'd be in time to help the girl. And remembering how her face had lighted when he had asked her if she liked sailing, he decided that he would bring her out some time and that the reefs would be a wonderful place to begin teaching a kid the wonder of the world.

But he, the heir of all the ages, had had to serve as shark bait after all.

* * *

ANSWERS to KING OF THE CASTLE! on page 38

1. *The Akond of Swat, in Edward Lear's Nonsense Rhyme.*
2. *Mr. Dombey, in "Dombey and Son", by Charles Dickens.*
3. *The poet, in W. B. Yeats' poem, "The Lake Isle of Innisfree."*
4. *Orsino, Duke of Illyria, in Shakespeare's "Twelfth Night."*
5. *Father William, in Lewis Carroll's poem, "You are old, Father William."*
6. *Sir Pitt Crawley, in W. M. Thackeray's "Vanity Fair."*
7. *Macavity, the Mystery Cat, in T. S. Eliot's poem of that title.*
8. *Heathcliff, in Emily Brontë's "Wuthering Heights."*
9. *The Duke, in Robert Browning's poem, "My Last Duchess."*

* * *

SOLUTION to ARGOSY CROSSWORD on page 160

Across. 1, On the rocks. 6, Drop. 10, Agate. 11, Tangerine. 12, Beetroot. 13, There. 15, Wringer. 17, Chariot. 19, Endless. 21, Venison. 22, Beard. 24, Bookworm. 27, Impulsive. 28, Fence. 29, Reel. 30, Better self.

Down. 1, Opal. 2, Trade wind. 3, Exeat. 4, Outdoor. 5, Kinetic. 7, Raise. 8, Presenting. 9, Restrain. 14, Sweet briar. 16, Greedily. 18, Insurance. 20, Sublime. 21, Violent. 23, Apple. 25, Wafer. 26, Leaf.

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FOOL'S PARADISE

or Ne'er the Rose Without the Thorn

All right! You've done your worst. You force me to tell you
The disastrous truth. I love you. A misadventure
So intolerable, hell could not do more.
Nothing in the world could touch me
And you have to come and be the damnable
Exception. I was nicely tucked up for the night
Of eternity, and like a restless dream
Of a fool's paradise, you, with a rainbow where
Your face is and an ignis fatuus
Worn like a rose in your girdle, come pursued
By fire, and presto! the bedclothes are on the floor
And I, the tomfool, love you.

CHRISTOPHER FRY, *The Lady's Not for Burning*

Figurehead

A small group of watermen, a woman or two, and a fringe of small children were gathered in the fish-market around a painter and his easel . . . Some six paces before him there leant against one of the granite pillars a woman of exceeding beauty . . . her face brown and broad-browed, with a heavy chin that gave character to the rest of her features, and large eyes, black as sloes, that regarded the artist and the group at his elbow with a sombre disdain . . .

"A couple of strokes, and it's finished," said the artist . . .

The faces gathered closer to stare. 'Liza left the pillar, stretched herself to her full height, and came forward, tying the strings of her sun-bonnet.

"'Tis the very daps of her!" was Captain Hosken's comment as he pulled out his three half-crowns . . . He took the portrait carefully from the easel, and held it before him, between his open palms.

"Neighbours all," he began, his rather stupid face overspread with an expression of satisfied cunning, "I promised to tell 'ee my reasons for havin' 'Liza's portrait took . . .

"When I gazes 'pon 'Liza," he pursued, "my eyes be fairly dazzled wi' the looks o' her. I allow that. She's got that build, an' them lines about the neck an' waist, an' them red-ripe lips, that I feels no care to look 'pon any other woman. That's why I took up wi' her, an' offered her my true heart. But strike me if I'd counted 'pon her temper; an' she's got the temper of Old Nick! . . . But, you see, I couldn't bear to break it off wi' her, because I didn't want to miss her beautiful looks."

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The women began to titter and 'Liza's face to flame, but her lover proceeded with great complacency:

"Well, I was beset in my mind till an hour agone, when—as I walked down here with 'Liza, half mad to take leave of her, and sail for Rio Grande, and likewise sick of her temper—I sees this gentleman a-doin' pictures at seven-an'-six; and thinks I, 'If I can get 'en to make a copy of 'Liza's good looks, then I shall take off to sea as much as I want of her, an' the rest, temper included, can bide at home till I calls for it.' That's all I've got to say. 'Liza's a beauty beyond compare, an' her beauty I worships, an' means to worship. But if any young man wants to take her, I tell him he's welcome. So long t'ye all!"

Still holding the canvas carefully a foot from his waistcoat, to avoid smearing it, he sauntered off to the quay steps, and hailed his boat to carry him aboard.

SIR ARTHUR QUILLER-COUCH, 1863-1944, *The Delectable Duchy*

Bittersweet

That other madness is on women. It maketh the heart go astray saith the wise man, and minishes the mind of man. Pleasant at first she is, like Dioscorides' rhododaphne, that fair plant to the eye, but poison to the taste, the rest as bitter as wormwood in the end and sharp as a two-edged sword.

ROBERT BURTON, 1577-1640, *The Anatomy of Melancholy*

Death From Natural Causes!

The family of Camoëns was illustrious, and originally Spanish . . . There are some who maintain that their name alluded to a certain wonderful bird, the *Camao*, whose mischievous sagacity discovered and punished the smallest deviation from conjugal fidelity. A lady of the house of Cadmon, whose conduct had been rather indiscreet, demanded to be tried by this extraordinary judge. Her innocence was proved, and in gratitude to the being who had restored him to matrimonial felicity, the contented husband adopted his name.

Formerly, every well regulated family in Spain retained one of these terrible attendants. The infidelity of its mistress was the only circumstance which could deprive it of life. Should her guilt have been extended to any degree beyond a wish, the faithful bird immediately betrayed it, by expiring at the feet of its injured lord. It soon was difficult to find a *Camao* that had lived in the same family during three generations; and at length the species became entirely extinct!

LORD STRANGFORD, 1780-1855,
The Life and Writings of Luis de Camoëns

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No Rest For The Blessed

He that a white horse and a fair wife keepeth,
For fear, for care, for jealousy scarce sleepeth.

JOHN FLORIO, 1553-1625, *Second Frutes*

Tryst By Moonlight

It was during the Godless Month, on a beautiful winter night, as I was leaving the Palace I saw a certain young courtier, who, when I told him I was driving out to spend the night at the Dainagans, said that my way was his and joined me. The road passed my lady's house and here it was that he alighted . . .

At once this man—whom I now knew to be that other lover whose existence I had guessed—went and sat unconcernedly on the bamboo sheeting and began to gaze at the moon. The chrysanthemums were just in full bloom, the bright fallen leaves were trembling and falling in the wind. It was indeed a scene of wonderful beauty that met our eyes. Presently he took a flute out of the folds of his dress, and began to play upon it. Then putting the flute aside, he began to murmur " Sweet is the shade " and other catches. Soon a pleasant-sounding native zither began to tune up somewhere within the house and an ingenuous accompaniment was fitted to his careless warblings. Her zither was tuned to the autumn-mode, and she played with so much tenderness and feeling that though the music came from behind closed shutters it sounded quite modern and passionate, and well accorded with the soft beauty of the moonlight. The courtier was ravished, and as he stepped forward to place himself right under her window, he turned to me and remarked in a self-satisfied voice, that among the fallen leaves no other footsteps had left its mark. Then plucking a chrysanthemum he sang

" *Strange that the music of your lute,*
These matchless flowers and all the beauty of the night
Have lured no other feet to linger at your door."

LADY MURASAKI, *The Tale of Genji,*
translated from the Japanese by ARTHUR WALEY

Enfin

Of all nations, the Russians seem to me to behave most wisely . . . The wife promises her husband never to let him see her transgressions of infidelity ; and he as punctually promises, whenever she is so detected, without the least anger, to beat her without mercy : so they both know what each has to expect ; the lady transgresses, is beaten, taken again into favour, and all goes on as before.

OLIVER GOLDSMITH, 1730-1774, *The Citizen of the World*

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CONTRABAND WOMAN

Beneath her beauty and courage, there was the faint and inexplicable signature of doom

by BURNHAM CARTER

IN the old days in Havana, the beautiful *señoritas* used to ride up and down the Prado in their carriages or *volantas* in the late afternoon, to be gazed upon by the young bloods strolling along the pavements. Today the Prado still has its parade, but the carriages are gone, and the cheerful, chattering crowd is of the people—all kinds, except, indeed, the very ones that began the custom. But in the last cool darkness of night—the haunted hour before dawn—when sober citizens are abed and the tourist revellers either have scattered to their hotels or nod blearily in the wicked fringes of the city, the Prado falls silent and seems to listen for the returning footfalls of the past—for the clip-clop of the horses' hooves.

It was at just this hour that Tio Martinez, returning from a game of cards at the house of Romero, underworld boss of the waterfront, saw approaching him a *volanta* drawn by two horses, with a uniformed postillion on the off horse, and in the seat two women—one elderly and asleep, with hands clasped across an ample stomach; the other young and alert, her face half hidden behind a black veil hanging from a high Spanish comb in her hair. As the carriage passed, a small and jewelled hand pushed the veil aside and a lovely face smiled down at him.

Tio Martinez was a practical man, who, with his wife, owned and managed a restaurant—the *Café Mosca*—on one of the narrow streets of the old city. Prior to his marriage, he had operated with some distinction in various activities outside the law. Thus, he was not a man to be led astray by visions after midnight. This one, however, was more beguiling than most, and he pondered it pleasantly as he walked back to the *Café Mosca*, closed now by a huge steel shutter.

Upstairs, his wife, the plump and pretty Amelia, was sitting up in bed, awake because she was cross, and cross because she was awake. It was clearly not a propitious moment to mention the young *señorita* in the *volanta*.

"It is dawn," Amelia said. "What an hour for a married man of thirty five to be coming home!"

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"It is long since I have seen you at dawn, Little Flower," he murmured, "and now I remember it is the hour at which you are most beautiful."

Amelia's hand went automatically to her hair, and she relaxed. Besides, it suddenly occurred to her that she was in a strategic position to advance a plan of her own.

"There is something I wish to discuss with you, Tio," she stated.

"Let us wait until morning," Tio responded promptly, with a husband's intuition of something difficult or expensive.

"No, *now*. I wish to say that it is time you and I had a holiday."

"Yes, star of my heart, it is. I was thinking that we could take a little trip to the end of the island—"

"No," Amelia interrupted firmly. "In seven years of restaurant keeping, all we have had for holidays are little two day trips to points on the island. I wish a trip of four weeks to Paris, by air both ways."

From her bedside table she took a newspaper advertisement of a special Parisian holiday offered by an airline for a thousand dollars for two.

Tio slid into the bed beside her. "Give me your shoulder, Little Flower, that I may think more constructively," he begged.

"We have just enough money in the savings bank," Amelia continued, disposing herself as requested.

"Yes, it would take all," Tio murmured, "but you deserve it." He slid into sleep with the ease of the innocent.

He hoped that his wife's fancy would pass. During the week, however, the project continued to advance without further discussion; Amelia had stopped at the airlines office "to enquire about the details"; she was now making a list of clothing and luggage needed for the journey; she was reading a book on Paris restaurants. Tio did not begrudge her the trip. But did it not call for some special venture in money making that would permit their savings to remain intact?

This question was on his mind when he went again to Romero's for the weekly card game. The *volanta* with its beautiful passenger had reappeared, and one of those present claimed to have seen it; there had even been a newspaper story about it.

Tio had no chance to join in the discussion, because Romero led him aside. "I have a business matter to discuss with you," he stated.

Romero was a squat, unscrupulous Cuban, who, beginning as a political handyman, had now become a powerful manipulator on Havana's piers. He had gone far, and at least two of those who had stood in his way were listed among Havana's rare waterfront

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killings. He now had a hand in many pier operations, including the hiring of seamen. His enterprises were consequently so numerous that good managers were badly needed.

"So, my friend, I thought of you," he concluded.

Tio acknowledged the compliment with an inclination of his head. He was tempted. He had promised Amelia never to return to his lucrative underworld activities, but, on the other hand, it was Amelia who, in a sense, was creating the need for them. If Romero had offered him a job with a quick turnover—a night's smuggling, for example—he might have accepted on the spot. But a long term relationship was less attractive. He did not like Romero, who would not have hesitated to *garrotte* his parents if there had been a profit in it.

"It would, of course, be a pleasure to be associated with you," Tio remarked. "But I am now merely a restaurant keeper, a humble member of the free enterprise system."

Romero's small suspicious eyes rested on Tio's face. "If you have some thought of resuming your former activities without me," he said, "I would not advise it. The waterfront is mine, Tio."

"The Havana waterfront is yours," Tio agreed. "But an island has a long coast line."

"No longer than my arm," Romero rejoined darkly. "Better think it over, my friend."

There was no mistaking the menace in the voice, but Tio had, as yet, no reason to worry over it.

The next morning he was standing behind the *Mosca*'s bar, rinsing the huge white coffee urn, when a man entered and stopped in front of him. He was young, with a pale face, and a bitter mouth; and he was wearing a suit that was better tailored than those seen on the regular patrons of the *Mosca*.

In a low, crisp voice the stranger enquired, "You are Tio Martinez, are you not?"

"It is my fortune, for good or ill, *señor*."

"I should like to converse with you on a matter of great importance, and one which I believe can be of considerable profit to you. But not here." The young man then pushed a slip of paper across the counter. "There is my name and address. Will you come to see me?"

On the paper was written "Emilio Dura," and Tio recognized the address as one of the old streets near the waterfront—a street once fashionable, but now down at heel. There could be no harm in looking into the matter, which might offer an alternative to Romero's proposition.

"I will come to see you," he said.

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At eight thirty that evening, Tio told Pepe, Amelia's brother, who waited at the tables, to take charge of the café. Impeccably clad in a tan linen suit, pale blue shirt and pink tie, he walked down the Street of the Bishop to the street named in the address. The house was an old stone mansion with long, iron grilled windows and a pair of enormous bronze studded mahogany doors twelve feet wide.

Tio was admitted by a manservant, and found himself in a spacious *patio*. Inside, Emilio Dura waited for him, dressed in full evening clothes. His manner was haughty and formal.

" My cousin is ready to receive you," he stated, and conducted Tio into a room of moderate size—a kind of council chamber with a deep blue tiled floor and a carved mahogany ceiling with gold medallions. The two men stood in silence until there appeared in the doorway a dark haired girl of great beauty, perhaps twenty years old, wearing a green velvet dress with a necklace of diamonds. Without waiting for her cousin's introduction, she greeted Tio in a clear pleasant voice and seated herself in a fanbacked leather chair tooled in gold. She had a slender oval face, a straight nose and a firm red mouth that softened charmingly as she smiled.

" I am grateful to you for coming to see me," she said. " I shall first tell you briefly what I want, and you can tell me whether you will help me. If so, we can talk more in detail. Sometimes it is necessary for people to move secretly and in violation of the law, for the sake of a good cause. Is it not so ? "

" I do not know, *señora*," Tio replied. " I know only that people must often move secretly for the sake of a bad one."

A look of amusement flashed across her face, but her cousin, standing stiffly beside them, did not respond.

" Be that as it may," she continued, " you have been described to me as a man who is familiar with the Cuban waterfront, and can be trusted to arrange such operations. Within a short period of time, a month perhaps, four of us—myself, my cousin here, the servant who admitted you, and my duenna—will go to Spain. We must leave Havana secretly, travel on board ship secretly and enter Spain secretly. I would like you to arrange that for us. I will pay you, personally, a thousand dollars, in addition to the costs of the undertaking."

It was, Tio thought, a significant coincidence that the amount offered should be exactly the sum needed for the Parisian holiday. " It is true that I could smuggle you out of Cuba, *señora*," he said, " although I should do so with regret, but Spain is beyond the area of my experience."

" Of course. But you can find me someone to handle that end of it."

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That was possible. One of the *Mosca*'s customers was a certain Figueroa who had left Spain a year ago, under pressure.

"A freighter with two passenger cabins and a co-operative captain would solve the rest of the problem," the lady went on.

"Why do you wish to go secretly to Spain, *señora*?"

The dark eyes of the lady gazed thoughtfully into space. Then she straightened in the high backed chair, folded her hands in her lap, and spoke to her cousin. "You will tell him who I am, Emilio."

The pale young man stood even more stiffly than before, his arms at his sides. He spoke as if making an announcement to a throng: "I have the honour to present Doña Maria Cristina de la Santa Perrera y Menton, a royal princess, a duchess in line of succession to the throne of Spain in descent from the kings of Navarre." He relaxed and added in a low prayerful voice, "May God protect her!"

The princess inclined her head. "My cousin is the Duke of Castile and Count of Zalaca," she said.

"I am Tio Martinez, owner and manager of the *Café Mosca*," Tio said, bowing.

The princess again inclined her head, and with the same grave courtesy, but her mouth twitched. "And now, cousin, will you leave me to confer with the gentleman alone?"

The young duke bowed from the waist and withdrew.

The princess rose from her chair. "Will you have a cigarette?" she enquired, offering Tio one from a painted ivory box. "And I think we shall have some sherry wine."

She pulled the bell cord and instructed the servant. Then she stood in silence, one jewelled hand resting on the mahogany table, until the sherry was brought and served.

"I wish to persuade you to help me," she murmured, with a winsome smile. "So I have been planning my argument and choosing my words with care. You have never been to Spain?"

"No, princess."

"To me it is a tragic country," she said. "And I wish to make it great again." Her voice was musical, with a break of sadness in it, as in Spanish songs.

The princess glanced at Tio, but he was sipping his sherry with a noncommittal expression.

"I come from a royal line," she resumed. "I have been well educated. And I have the ability and knowledge to lead. I need one thing—I need a legend, a dramatic background, a symbol to lift men's hearts. I am now creating that legend. Perhaps you have heard already of the girl who rides in the *volanta* after midnight?"

"Yes. In fact, I have seen her."

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"You do not recognize me, then?"

Ah, of course, this was the proud and lovely face that had leaned towards him in the lamplight. "Yes, I remember you now," Tio said.

"Soon this legend will be on everyone's tongue, a tale reported in the journals of the world. Then someone, when I bid him, will drop a word; word that I am a princess come back from the Spanish past, to restore the old Spanish glory. The word will flash through Cuba, through the Spanish-speaking countries of the New World, to the mother country in the Old. Spanish eyes will brighten, Spanish tongues will quicken.

"They begin to watch for me. Then I vanish. People ask and wonder and wait. And suddenly my carriage whirls at dawn through Madrid. The rumour runs through the ancient city, the crowds gather, the police are posted. But the next night I am in Seville, and then Salamanca, and Toledo, and Ávila!" She faced Tio and flung out her hands. "The crowds are enormous. The people follow me. They cry, '*Viva la Reina!*' And once again there is a queen in Spain!"

The impassioned voice died slowly out of the room. Tio was moved, despite himself, but he was also disturbed by a sense of impending fatality which was hard to define. Here, underlying the beauty and courage of this woman, there was, it seemed to him, the faint and unexplainable signature of doom.

The princess lifted her glass, sipped her sherry, put it down and said slowly, "You think this is fantastic beyond belief?"

"It is fantastic, princess."

"Yes. It is fantastic—almost as fantastic as that a peasant girl from Domremy should become Joan of Arc. Or that an unschooled farmer's boy from a log cabin should become the hero of the Colossus of the North. Were not these things fantastic, and did they not come to pass?"

"Yes, it is so."

"Well, then!" she cried triumphantly. "I have answered your question as to why I must go secretly to Spain. And you, I know, will help me."

"Yes, I will help you," Tio said.

Later, as he walked home, he was surprised at his prompt acceptance. But his own fortune was not necessarily involved in the fortune of the cause, and surely it would have been unfair to Amelia to reject a thousand dollars so providentially offered him—at so slight a risk and so small an illegality.

At the café, Amelia was seated, cool and competent, at the cash register.

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" I have been sipping sherry with a royal princess," Tio informed her, " and I have agreed to help to put her on the throne of Spain."

" You are drunk," Amelia asserted, warding off his hand, which was threatening her thigh.

" I am drunk," Tio admitted, " but not with wine."

" With love, perhaps ? "

" No, not with love."

" With what, then ? "

Tio hesitated. " With glory," he answered.

" Bah ! " Amelia exclaimed in disgust, and left him to return to her supervision of the kitchen.

His statement had a foreseen effect upon her; it was too preposterous to merit further investigation. The topic was forgotten, which Tio thought was just as well.

During the next week he conducted discreet negotiations with several of the *Mosca*'s patrons concerning methods of transportation for his client. The secret departure from Cuba was easy : a fishing launch would take the four passengers at midnight from the Cove of the Cross, between Havana and Matanzas, to a freighter waiting offshore. For the landing on the Spanish coast, Figueroa had a man in San Fernando, Spain, who would meet the freighter there, at a point and time to be given by radio upon approach.

The selection of the freighter was more difficult. The ship had to be fit for a transatlantic voyage; the captain and crew had to be trustworthy. The best place to find such an outfit was Havana Harbour, but that was controlled by Romero, and Tio did not want to deal with him. He hired Sam, the American taxi driver and the *Mosca*'s only real drinker, to drive him to the sugar port of Matanzas, where he found one Hansen, captain of the tramp steamer *Gloria*, loading up with sugar for the Canary Islands, and prepared to return in five weeks for other cargo. Hansen had a crew of four Chinese who spoke no English, and a Portuguese engineer who, for fifty dollars, was willing to forget anything he might see. The *Gloria*, while old and odorous, had two reasonably clean unoccupied cabins next to the captain's quarters.

Tio made the deal and, on leaving the pier, saw a Cuban in soiled white shirt and pants leaning against a café front. There was nothing at all remarkable about the Cuban—he was dressed like thousands of others and had the same idle manner—but Tio had seen this Cuban before. And recently. Where ? He spoke to Sam, sitting in his taxi, his rum smell unmistakably freshened.

" He bought me a drink," Sam said. " He is one of Romero's men."

" From Havana ? "

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" Yes."

Tio remembered now; he had seen him yesterday, waiting outside the *Mosca*. " We are being followed, then ? "

" Looks like it," Sam replied indifferently.

Apparently Romero had grown sufficiently suspicious to trail him, Tio thought. It was annoying, but it could do little harm. His work was finished now until Hansen returned from the Canary Islands five weeks from then, to pick up the princess's party. By that time Romero would have lost interest.

In the meanwhile the princess's legend was growing as rapidly as she had predicted. There was no Cuban fishing village, however isolated, that had not heard of the beautiful ghost in the " flying *volanta* "—so called because a common version of the tale had it ascending and descending in the sky. A few had actually seen it; many more claimed they had. Some seamen singing their way to a bar on the waterfront had seen it vanish into a wall. The police did nothing, since no law was broken; and besides, the American tourists were entertained.

When Tio called one night on the princess to report, he found her elated over the fame of her night rides.

" Is it not as I foretold ? " she challenged him. " Am I not becoming a legend ? "

" A woman of great beauty always becomes a legend," Tio said.

As he looked at her, he felt again a presentiment of disaster, and so he dropped his eyes before her gaze.

" And does it still seem so fantastic that I should become queen of Spain ? "

" Not if a sensible man were king."

" Am I intelligent ? Do I have the power of command ? Will people follow me ? "

" Yes to all these things, princess—particularly the last."

" Ah, you are impossible," she said. " You never tell me quite what I wish to hear." But she smiled.

They had met several times by now, and were good friends. The princess was amused by Tio's calm assumption that they were equals, she appreciated his urbane conversation and trusted his word. The young duke remained unfriendly and suspicious, but Tio recognized him as a fanatically devoted follower of the princess who would carry out her orders to the death . . . and who would certainly put a knife into anyone whom he suspected of betrayal. It was the duke who suggested that Tio come with them, obviously for the purpose of having a hostage aboard, but Tio smiled into the distrustful eyes and replied blandly, " I feel safer on land."

On a golden afternoon in June the Princess Maria received

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the press. Since the notice had stated that the mystery of the flying *volanta* would be revealed, there were some twenty reporters and photographers present, including two press association men and two New York correspondents.

Enthroned in her chair, and entirely at ease, the princess stated that she intended to return to Spain and claim the throne. Genealogical proofs of her royalty were distributed by the duke. The reporters stuffed them into their pockets and began asking questions. The princess answered some, declined others and terminated the interview with a grandness of manner that even the journalists found impressive. She and her party were to leave secretly that night. Hansen reported that the *Gloria* would sail from Matanzas at eight; one of his Chinese crew had mysteriously disappeared, and he had been forced to make a quick and not too promising replacement from a local waterfront dive.

At nine o'clock Tio stopped at the princess's mansion with Sam, the American taxi driver; and the princess, the duke, the *duenna* and the manservant stowed themselves away in Sam's battered car. Tomorrow, when the newspapers were out, the house would be under constant public scrutiny, but no one was there when the great doors opened for the last time to let out, not the elegant *volanta*, but an old car which rattled through the outer reaches of the city and turned north towards the coast.

The road became steadily worse, until finally it was no more than a track used by wagon teams. Then they smelled a salt wind and saw the black line of the sea, and they were alone among the dunes surrounding the Cove of the Cross, except for a wizened Cuban fisherman waiting at the water's edge near a rickety plank pier where a motor launch was tied.

The princess stood on the sand under the vast, spangled arch of the sky, with the sea whispering at her feet. She wore a green silk shawl about her head, and her classic face was the colour of moonlight, with two stars in the darkness of her eyes. If there were any leader worth dying for—and Tio frankly did not believe there was—she would qualify better than most.

"Well, here we say goodbye, my friend," she said to him. "You have done well. I thank you."

"I have been happy to serve you, princess."

The princess flashed her little white teeth at him in a smile. "And you still think my cause is fantastic?"

Tio shrugged. "Fantastic is just a word for what happens tomorrow."

"You believe in me, then?"

"I wish you luck, princess."

"How much of that do I need?"

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" No man or woman has ever had too much."

The princess extended her hand, and he kissed it with a ceremonial grace that would have done credit to the young duke himself. " You are an amiable man," she said, " and when I am queen of Spain, you must come to see me."

" Thank you."

" You and your wife."

" I would not dare to come alone, princess."

Then she was gone into the boat, carried in the strong arms of her servant, who did not trust the plank. The young duke handed Tio ten hundred dollar bills, with another hundred for costs. " So far, so good," he said, and departed without another word.

Tio stayed on the beach while the launch disappeared into the darkness. He saw the lights of the freighter come up from the east, and after a time the launch returned, its passengers safely discharged into the ship. Tio paid the owner of the launch fifty dollars and returned to the taxi and to Sam, who had made considerable progress with a bottle of rum. Sam sang as they drove back to Havana, but Tio was silent, with a funny feeling inside him, one to which he was not accustomed—an emptiness as if a rib had been removed or his heart moved out of its usual place. An abstemious man, he took a little of Sam's rum to mollify the sensation, but despite this medication, he was moody when he arrived at the *Mosca*.

Amelia said nothing, but began to think back over the past few weeks, recalling that Tio's card games had been more frequent than usual. In the morning she had a clue: the newspapers all had front page stories, with photographs of the beautiful princess and her incredible crusade. It was the sort of tale that appealed to Spanish hearts everywhere, and the newspapers made the most of it. What made the story more provocative was the fact that the princess had already vanished; late editions reported no trace of her—the mansion was empty and an aged caretaker in charge knew nothing.

As Amelia read the papers that morning, she recalled Tio's strange remark about drinking sherry with a princess. " You had something to do with this," she said to him as they sat at lunch in the kitchen.

" Yes, Little Flower."

" Why did you not tell me? "

" I did tell you."

" Ay, but in such a way."

Tio opened his wallet and showed her the thousand dollars. " I have earned this for our trip."

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"*Madre mia!*" She looked glad, and then concerned. "There will be no trouble with the police?"

"It is over. She has gone," Tio assured her.

But he did not realize how far their journey had already taken them; he found out later that day, when the afternoon newspapers, still buzzing about the princess' disappearance, but with more fiction and less fact, reported on another page that the freighter *Gloria*, bound for Cadiz out of Matanzas with a cargo of sugar and fifty drums of aviation petrol, blew up some eighty miles north of Havana. The captain and crew of four were lost; the only survivor, picked up by an incoming fishing schooner, was a stowaway named Emilio Dura, who could offer no explanation of the cause of the explosion.

Tio folded the paper neatly, so that the edges were even, and dropped it into the wastepaper basket. So the little princess would never reach her beloved country; she would never ride through Madrid or Salamanca with the crowds shouting; she would never even try to be a queen. It was as he had foreseen all the time. Perhaps he should have told her, but she would not have believed.

Tio lit a cigarette and abruptly left the bar. He walked to the Prado and stayed there awhile, watching the evening traffic move up and down the promenade.

When he returned, it was the café's busiest hour, and Pepe was frantic and Amelia enraged. She approached Tio with a scathing comment ready on her tongue, but she dropped it, unspoken, when she saw his face. It was expressionless, but so cold that it frightened her. He did not want supper, but stayed at the bar. He was wondering when the young duke, Emilio Dura, would come, and what he would say to him. Romero entered, surly with drink, and insisted that Tio sit with him.

"You have underestimated my power, my friend," Romero muttered through loose lips. He leaned forward ominously. "Do not think I have been ignorant of your dealings with one Hansen. And yesterday he needed a man for a sugar freighter. He tried to avoid me by hiring him in Matanzas." Romero's features contorted themselves into a look of unspeakable cunning, but he failed to notice Tio's sudden terrible intentness. "But he hired one of my men just the same! With a little incendiary pencil for the cargo —just a small one, you understand, to make the ship turn back— and maybe hire over again in Havana." Romero sat back complacently. "I control the waterfront, Tio!"

"The ship blew up," Tio said. "They were all drowned."

Romero blinked, but recovered. "Well, was that my fault?

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He must have handled it wrong; sugar don't blow up. But what is one tramp steamer more or less?"

"What, indeed?" Tio agreed evenly. "Look, Romero, what you say impresses me. Remain here for a while. There is a man coming you should meet. An associate of mine . . . from Spain. When he comes, I'll close the café and we'll talk. All right?"

"Okay."

Tio returned to the bar. He was sure the other would come. And in an hour the other did come, striding in from the street, with his disdainful face and bitter mouth, but with the once well tailored suit shapeless and wrinkled, as if it had been wet, and then dried, but not yet pressed.

"I have been waiting for you," Tio said.

"You said you were safer on land," Emilio Dura replied in a low, clipped voice, his hand in his coat pocket. "But you were mistaken."

"I have not betrayed you," Tio said. "She is lost, then?"

"She is lost." The grey eyes were hard with pain and hate.

"Believe me, you are wrong in what you are thinking," Tio said wearily. "I wished her well."

He walked round the corner of the bar. "I am going to close the café now. Stay with me and you will find what you seek." He flicked the light switch off and on in the room, and then pulled down the clanging steel shutter that closed the café front. The patrons looked at their watches in surprise—the hour was only eleven—but left promptly, guessing that the thin stranger was of the secret police. Romero remained at his table, and Tio introduced Emilio Dura to him.

"If it is waterfront information you wish, *señor*," Tio addressed Dura, "here is your man. There is nothing that happens there without his knowledge and permission. Those that ignore that fact are apt to get into difficulty. Even last night there was one Hansen of the freighter *Gloria*—"

"Let us mention no names," Romero rumbled.

"All right. But this one tried to avoid hiring Romero's men. And what happened?" Tio turned to Romero with a deferential smile.

"Neither he nor his crew will sail again," Romero stated. His eyes, bloodshot from drinking, peered at Dura in sudden suspicion. "What is it you want of me, *señor?*"

"I have a project that should be profitable to us both," Dura replied. "Where can we go not to be overheard? At my hotel? At your house?"

"At my house." Romero heaved himself from his chair, swaying a little. "One day you will come to me, Tio. And it will be too late."

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"It is too late now," Tio said.

He watched Romero's bulky figure follow Dura through the steel door, knowing he would not see it again. Then he closed the door and drank a glass of milk. It was too bad that one life had to be sacrificed for another, but he was quite sure that the right one had been saved.

On the following day the fatal shooting of Romero in the street filled the gap in the lack of news of the princess. The murder was undoubtedly the result of a waterfront feud, the police said; there were no clues to the killer.

During the next two weeks Tio gradually returned to normal, much to Amelia's relief; and he actually bought the tickets for Paris.

Without nourishment, the newspaper speculations about the princess began to fade. At night the street crowds along the Prado in Madrid were larger and more restless than usual, but the magic *volanta* did not appear, even to those who waited until dawn.

"What became of her?" Amelia asked. She wore a négligé, preparatory to going to bed, and had been studying herself in the mirror, alarmed by certain unorthodox bulges. She felt discouraged; she did not know whether to buy travelling clothes for her figure as it was or as it should be.

"Who knows?" Tio replied. He caught sight of Amelia's eyes watching him in the glass. There was a wistful look in them.

"Was she really very beautiful, Tio?"

"Yes," he answered judicially, "but she was too thin, Little Flower. Otherwise, she would have been almost as beautiful as you."

* * *

PASS!

A bus company had an illustrated poster on the window of each bus, showing an intending passenger with his hand outstretched as a signal to the driver that he wished to board the bus. Underneath the illustration was printed this couplet:

"*If you wish to travel, hold out your hand;*
The Driver then will understand."

To this, some disgruntled passenger who had evidently been left behind on some earlier occasion, had added in heavy crayon the words:

"*Of course he will, the silly cus,*
But will he stop the ruddy bus?"

Efficiency Magazine

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UNDER VENUS

YOUR mouth is fragrant as an orange-grove
In April, and your lips are hyacinths,
Dark, dew-wet, folded, petalled hyacinths
Which my tongue pierces like an amorous bee.

Your body is whiter than the moon-white sea,
More white than foam upon a rocky shore,
Whiter than that white goddess born of foam.

HOW could I love you more?
I would give up
Even that beauty I have loved too well
That I might love you better.
Alas, how poor the gifts that lovers give—
I can but give you of my flesh and strength,
I can but give these few passing days
And passionate words that since our speech began
All lovers whisper in all women's ears.

I try to think of some one gift
No lover yet in all the world has found;
I think: If the cold sombre gods
Were hot with love as I am
Could they not endow you with a star
And fix bright youth for ever in your limbs?
Could they not give you all things that I lack?

You should have loved a god; I am but dust.
Yet no god loved as loves this poor frail dust.

RICHARD ALDINGTON

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★*No Christmas number of Argosy would be complete without that staunch upholder of the traditional, Charles Dickens. And from his multitude of familiar spirits, who better to usher in the festive season than "that regular Pickwick."*

So bring in the wassail bowl and let us make merry, while we renew—

OLD ACQUAINTANCE

by CHARLES DICKENS

AS brisk as bees, if not altogether as light as fairies, did the four Pickwickians assemble on the morning of the twenty second day of December. Christmas was close at hand, in all its bluff and hearty honesty; it was the season of hospitality, merriment and open-heartedness; the old year was preparing, like an ancient philosopher, to call his friends around him, and amidst the sound of feasting and revelry to pass gently and calmly away. Gay and merry was the time, and gay and merry were at least four of the numerous hearts that were gladdened by its coming.

Happy, happy Christmas, that can win us back to the delusions of our childhood days; that can recall to the old man the pleasures of his youth; that can transport the sailor and the traveller back to his own fireside and his quiet home!

Mr. Pickwick and his friends are waiting in the cold on the outside of the Muggleton coach, which they have just attained, well wrapped up in greatcoats, shawls and comforters. The portmanteaux and carpet-bags have been stowed away, and Mr. Weller and the guard are endeavouring to insinuate into the fore-boot a huge cod-fish several sizes too large for it—which is snugly packed up in a long brown basket, with a layer of straw over the top, and which has been left to the last, in order that he may repose in safety on the half-dozen barrels of real native oysters, all the property of Mr. Pickwick.

The interest displayed in Mr. Pickwick's countenance is most intense, as Mr. Weller and the guard try to squeeze the cod-fish into the boot, first head first, and then tail first, and then top upward, and then bottom upward, and then sideways, and then longways, all of which artifices the implacable cod-fish sturdily resists, until the guard accidentally hits him in the middle of the basket, whereupon he suddenly disappears into the boot, and with him, the head and shoulders of the guard himself, who, not calculating upon so sudden

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a cessation of the passive resistance of the cod-fish, experiences a very unexpected shock, to the unsmotherable delight of all the porters and bystanders.

Upon this, Mr. Pickwick smiles with great good humour, and drawing a shilling from his waistcoat pocket, begs the guard, as he picks himself out of the boot, to drink his health in a glass of hot brandy and water; at which the guard smiles, too, and Messrs. Snodgrass, Winkle and Tupman, all smile in company. The guard and Mr. Weller disappear for five minutes; most probably to get the hot brandy and water, for they smell very strongly of it when they return. Then the coachman mounts to the box, Mr. Weller jumps up behind, the Pickwickians pull their coats round their legs and their shawls over their noses, the helpers pull the horse-cloths off, the coachman shouts out a cheery "All right," and away they go.

They have rumbled through the streets, and jolted over the stones, and at length reach the wide and open country. The wheels skim over the hard and frosty ground; and the horses, bursting into a canter at a smart crack of the whip, step along the road as if the load behind them—coach, passengers, cod-fish, oyster barrels, and all, were but a feather at their heels.

Such was the progress of Mr. Pickwick and his friends by the Muggleton Telegraph, on their way to Dingley Dell; and at three o'clock that afternoon they all stood, high and dry, safe and sound, hale and hearty, upon the steps of the *Blue Lion*.

Leaving the redoubtable Sam to deal with the luggage, they set off across the fields towards Mr. Wardle's house. And, arrived, what was the warmth and cordiality of their reception?

Everyone repaired to the kitchen, where, from the centre of the ceiling old Wardle had just suspended, with his own hands, a huge branch of mistletoe, and this same branch of mistletoe instantaneously gave rise to a scene of general and delightful struggling and confusion; in the midst of which, Mr. Pickwick, with a gallantry that would have done honour to a descendant of Lady Tollimglower herself, took Mr. Wardle's mother by the hand, led her beneath the mystic branch, and saluted her in all courtesy and decorum.

The old lady submitted to this piece of practical politeness with all the dignity which befitted so important and serious a solemnity, but the younger ladies, not being so thoroughly imbued with a superstitious veneration for the custom: or imagining that the value of a salute is very much enhanced if it cost a little trouble to obtain it, screamed and struggled, and ran into corners, and threatened and remonstrated, and did everything but leave the room, until some of the less adventurous gentlemen were on the point of desisting, whereupon the young ladies all at once found it useless to

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resist any longer, and submitted to be kissed with a good grace. Mr. Winkle kissed the young lady with black eyes, and Mr. Snodgrass kissed Emily, and Mr. Weller, not being particular about the particular being under the mistletoe, kissed Emma and the other female servants, just as he caught them.

Now the screaming had subsided, and faces were in a glow, and curls in a tangle, and Mr. Pickwick was standing under the mistletoe, looking with a very pleased countenance on all that was passing around him, when the young lady with the black eyes, after a little whispering with the other young ladies, made a sudden dart forward, and, putting her arm round Mr. Pickwick's neck, saluted him affectionately on the left cheek; and before Mr. Pickwick distinctly knew what was the matter, he was surrounded by the whole body, and kissed by every one of them.

It was a pleasant thing to see Mr. Pickwick in the centre of the group, now pulled this way, and then that, and first kissed on the chin, and then on the nose, and then on the spectacles; and to hear the peals of laughter which were raised on every side; but it was a still more pleasant thing to see Mr. Pickwick, blinded shortly afterwards with a silk handkerchief, falling up against the wall, and scrambling into corners, and going through all the mysteries of blindman's buff, with the utmost relish for the game, until at last he caught one of the poor relations, and then had to evade the blindman himself, which he did with a nimbleness and agility that elicited the admiration and applause of all beholders.

When they were all tired of blindman's buff, there was a great game at snap-dragon, and when fingers enough were burned with that, and all the raisins were gone, they sat down by the huge fire of blazing logs to a substantial supper, and a mighty bowl of wassail, something smaller than an ordinary wash-house copper, in which the hot apples were hissing and bubbling with a rich look, and a jolly sound, that were perfectly irresistible.

"This," said Mr. Pickwick, looking round him, "this is, indeed, a comfort."

"Our invariable custom," replied Mr. Wardle. "Everybody sits down with us on Christmas Eve, as you see them now—servants and all; and here we wait, until the clock strikes twelve, to usher Christmas in."

* * *

A CHRISTMAS GREETING

Glorious time of great Too-Much, . . .
Right thy most unthrifty glee,
And pious thy mince-piety.

LEIGH HUNT, 1784-1859, *Christmas*

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GOOD COMPANY

Is't not fine to swim in wine,
And turn upon the toe,
And sing Hey nonny no!

AUTHOR UNKNOWN

When mirth reigns throughout the town, and feasters about the house, sitting in order, listen to a minstrel; when the tables beside them are laden with bread and meat, and the wine-bearer draws sweet drink from the mixing-bowl and fills the cups; this I think in my heart to be the most delightsome of all to men . . .

HOMER

Superior Party

Then Procurio entered once more and with a bow said, His lordship is going to a levie this morning and thinks it might amuse you to go too. Could you be ready by 11 oclock.

Oh yes what fun said Mr Salteena have you any notion what a levie is my man.

Procurio gave a superier smile. It is a party given by the Queen to very superier peaple but this one is given by the Prince of Wales as the Queen is not quite her usual self today . . .

Then they rumaged among Mr Salteenas things and Procurio got very intelligent and advised Mr Salteena to were his black evening suit and role up his trousers. He also lent him a pair of white silk stockings which he fastened tightly round his knees with red rosettes. Then he quickly cut out a star in silver paper and pinned it to his chest and also added a strip of red ribbon across his shirt front . . .

Presently the earl and Mr Salteena were clattering away to Buckingham palace . . . Just then the splendid edifice appeared in view and Mr. Salteena licked his dry lips at sight of the vast crowd. All round were carrages full of costly peaple . . . Mr Salteena followed his lordship up the grand steps trying to feel as homely as he could. Then a splendid looking fellow in a red tunick and a sort of black velvit tam a shanter stepped forward from the throng shouting what name please . . .

Then the portles divided and their names were shouted in chorus by countless domesticks. The sumshious room was packed with men of a noble nature dressed like the earl in satin knickerboccers

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etc and with ladies of every hue with long trains and jewels by the dozen. The earl and Mr Salteena struggled through the crowd till they came to a platform draped with white velvit. Here on a golden chair was seated the Prince of Wales in a lovely ermine cloak and a small but costly crown. He was chatting quite genially with some of the crowd . . .

Then the earl chipped in and how is the dear Queen he said reveruntly.

Not up to much said his Highness she feels the heat poor soul and he waved to a placard which said in large letters The Queen is indisposed.

Presently his Highness rose I think I will have a quiet glass of champaigne he said you come too . . . One grows weary of Court Life he remarked.

DAISY ASHFORD, *The Young Visiters*

A Feast

—viz., *a dish of marrow-bones ; a leg of mutton ; a loin of veal ; a dish of fowl ; three pullets and a dozen of larks all in a dish ; a great tart, a neat's tongue, a dish of anchovies ; a dish of prawns and cheese.*

SAMUEL PEPYS, *Diary, January 26th*, 1660

Under Cover

M. de Montaigne went to an entertainment given by the Governor, where the preparations were on a very grand scale . . .

At supper the ladies were waited upon by their cavaliers, who stand behind their chairs, ready to hand them wine or whatever else they require. There were a great number of roasted fowls served up with all their feathers on, as when alive ; capons cooked entire in glass cases ; and a vast quantity of hares and rabbits. He noticed that the table-linen was admirably folded. The ladies' table, when dinner was over, was taken away in pieces, and underneath it appeared another ready laid . . .

MICHEL DE MONTAIGNE, 1533-1592, *Journal, translated by* WILLIAM HAZLITT

A Silly Bird

The reply of a Walsall man when asked if he and his wife were going to have a goose for their Christmas dinner was : A goose is a silly bird, too much for one, not enough for two.

JACOB POOLE, 1774-1827, *Archaic Words*

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Banquet For One

Lucullus, the Roman host whose dinners are still talked about for their elaborate menus and their fabulous cost, grew tired one day of dining with other men.

He ordered a meal for one person. When it was served to him, he was conscious of a certain slackness: the wine was perhaps a shade too cold, and the sauce for the carp, which certainly was less succulent than usual, lacked that tang for which his chef was justly famed.

Lucullus frowned and summoned the major-domo.

"Perhaps, perhaps," that official agreed, with a flood of respectful salutations. "We thought that there was no need to prepare a fine banquet for my lord alone—"

"It is precisely when I am alone," the great gourmet answered, icily, "that you require to pay special attention to the dinner. At such times, you must remember, Lucullus dines with Lucullus."

M. F. K. FISHER, *Serve It Forth*

For Great Mercies—

. . . We drank a great many loyal toasts. I came home after eleven, after staying in Mr. Porter's wood near an hour and an half, the liquor opperating so much in the head that it rendered my leggs useless. Oh, how sensible I am of the goodness of the Divine Providence, that I am preserved from harm!

THOMAS TURNER, *Diary, December 8th*, 1759

—And For Festive Fare—

I sent to Mr. Hely a ribspare and hoggs puddings, for which hee returned mee a boxe of pills and sermons.

REV. GILES MOORE,
Rector of Horstead Keynes, Sussex, December 25th, 1674

—Laus Deo

O Domini & Chare puter,
That giv'st us wine in stead of water,
And from the Pond and River cleere,
Mak'st nappie Ale and good March Beere,
That send'st us sundry sorts of meate
And every thing we drinke or eate,
To maides, to wives, to boyes, to men,
Laus Deo sancte Amen.

JOSHUA COOKE, 1602

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ON THE STONE

Easy enough to issue a challenge, easy to meet it—if he could be sure of her

by NEIL M. GUNN

HIS body was young, prehensile and tough; supple, full of a rolling grace; quick on the toes. He liked a good blow-up when their boat was beating into harbour well fished; giving some style to the swinging seas. Blue-green eyes flashed in response, quick on his laughter. Sailing a boat or climbing a cliff, he knew the wind or the hand-grip. The old men liked Jeck. He stirred up the drowned serpent in their blood, quickened their glances, brought a forgotten savour into their mouths for the pure comedy of life. They would say anything to tease him, to set him going.

But one evening the comedy was presented so completely that the marvel of it stung them to a momentary silence. The meeting place was always the green in front of the salmon house, with the sea slapping the shingle where the cobles were hauled up. Tall grey poles stood about the green, usually festooned with grey nets and flat corks, but this evening the nets had just been taken down and the foreman, with one or two of his crew, was in the bothy. After their day's labour, young men and women would gather in about the green, gossip, play sudden chasing games, or dance in the summer dusk if crippled Alastair was there with his melodeon. The older men and greybeards propped up the stone gables or the wooden sheds with a shoulder or the flat of a back, or even stepped out a pace or two if reminiscence required a mimicry of action. It was a fishing community on a wild northern coast, backed by scattered crofts.

On this particular evening Ellen Macleod was there, and though there was nothing between Jeck and herself except a sort of conflict, yet this conflict frequently produced a clash of wits and a laugh. It could be relied on to add to the fun. She had a gleam in her dark eyes, and a provocative sarcasm could fade on her lips as she looked away. Jeck was slim, but she was full bodied, smooth over cheek and brow, and at times had a steady holding grace that set a swirl about her like the swirl in a dark pool.

Suddenly a couple of girls started chasing a young fellow round the poles, behind bodies, gripping the bodies as they swung past,

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shouting and screaming, until in no time there was a tremendous hullabaloo. No one knew what had happened—or cared. But a girl can hardly expect to use even the shyest fellow as a dodging post and get off with it. Jeck, however, was so much a fellow in himself and a fellow for everyone that the shyest girl could use him publicly without implication. And all at once he was aware of Ellen's voice telling him to watch where he was pushing.

"Oh, it's you, is it?" said Jeck.

"It is."

"Well, if t'was I barged into you I couldn't help it, could I? Besides—" he added, his eyes flashing.

"Besides what?"

"Just besides," said Jeck.

Someone laughed. "Give it her, Jeck!"

"I will if she's not careful," said Jeck, smiling, turning away.

Ellen's dark eyes caught their own fire. "I should like to see you try it."

Jeck swung round. "In a minute!" he said.

She regarded him with a mocking but dangerous gleam.

Then all in a moment he was going towards her. Her expression never wavered. On the contrary, it grew more tense; it so dared and repelled him that it was like a whip on his face. But he went on, hardly knowing himself in his action, aware of a monstrous folly. Now she was against him; his arms were round her stiff body; his mouth was swooping down on her lips; felt their cold firmness before she drew back.

The sound of the slap was heard all over the green. He stared at the black fury in her eyes. His face reddened; confused, speechless, he turned away trying to laugh, an awkward hunch to his shoulders. After the silence, men laughed loudly at him, but he had their sympathy. "You're soft to stand that from her!" For there was something vindictive in the way Ellen held her ground before slowly turning away. Clearly the lad had not meant anything special, and after all she had dared him. But the sting of the slap had stung them, too. It was exciting. They chuckled against the wall. "Here, Jeck, if I was you—"

But Jeck, as he gathered himself, didn't need any of their advice. "What's one more or less to me?" "One what?" they asked. He laughed now, leaving Ellen as one of the many.

But when it was quite dark he took to the grassy slopes that crested the sea cliffs, black anger in his heart, a twisting inner fury that in the instant of hating her called himself an ass. "What an almighty ass!" He smashed an iron-shod heel into the turf.

The northern sea boomed hollowly in the caverns, raised its grey face to an obliterating horizon. And it wasn't as if he was a

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weakling or anything. Sweet heaven, it wasn't. He crushed the bones of his face into the grass. Oh, damn her!

But he saw that it was no good damning her, for the paralyzing weakness lay in himself. Whenever he was in her company he felt himself going all unnatural, even physically, in the movement of his limbs, not to mention his tongue and its noises. It was like a secret disease. Oh, it was! And don't talk to him about being soft on her. Muck of that kind. Shut up! . . . He would make her pay. Oh, he would pay her out! He tore a fistful of turf. And he would do it, showing no more feeling than usual. None. Carrying on as if nothing had happened . . .

For no one had suspected his weakness; no one except herself. More than once she had secretly mocked him while he was in the awkward throes. He remembered the times, small occasions, in public yet unnoticed by others. For example that day when her father had by great seamanship brought home the *White Rose* under sail. He had not known what to say to her there before his own door in the little street. He had made some heavy idiotic joke about her father's hardihood. "He had courage, anyway," she replied, her dark eyes smiling.

What was there in that? Nothing. Even if she was implying that he, Jeck, hadn't much courage—in other things—what things? —well, she had to make her joke, too. Yet it was exactly as if a bomb had exploded inside him. He had gone all to bits, bits that held together miraculously, and marched away, throwing laughing sounds over a shoulder, while inwardly he felt the whole street following him from behind windows with laughing eyes.

Courage to dare her? He wondered, tortured. And even if her words had meant that, would he have had the courage to take the dare? . . . And all at once he realized it was not a question of her at all but himself, of command, control, over himself. Even at the prospect of meeting her he had always felt that control beginning to slip. Like a young fellow beginning to be seasick. As bad as that—and as shameful.

Then on the green there, faced by her challenge, he had for the first time gone on. Suddenly there had been nothing else in the world to do. Even if he had been walking to his death he would have had to go on. And she could have shoved him back in time, could have done something. But she had done nothing. She had waited with perfect control of herself. Then her body, her terrible eyes, her lips—he had felt the cold curves of them running into her teeth.

He lay over and got his teeth in the grass.

For there was a subtler poison still. Between them had always been something hidden or secret, an understanding or knowledge,

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and he had betrayed it. No, not that; he had betrayed what was delicate and hidden in her; gone up and kissed her like Judas. Before them all. She had stood without moving, knowing he would not dare, knowing he could not. Damn her! he suddenly thought, and lay still again while his mind began searching for some way of triumphing over her, of hurting her cruelly.

The search was difficult, but there was one obvious line of conduct; and that was never deliberately to avoid her presence, but on the contrary to swagger into it. She meant nothing to him. If she was sore about the fun on the green and continued to show it, why, it would be worth half a laugh—and, laughing, he would swagger off. He would make her squirm. He would drag the last pennyworth out of that slap. His fingers ripped off a whole divot of thin turf and flung it over the cliff edge. A rip of laughter went with it. A dangerous sea always inspired him. Why not?

As the boats returned the following morning, there was the customary crowd on the harbour wall. Ellen was waiting for her father as usual. With the boats all fast and the white fish on the quay, the fishermen straightened their backs. Then, the flesh on his bones dissolving, Jeck pretended to see Ellen for the first time, and in a cheery half boisterous voice cried, "Hello, Ellen!"

There was the blind uncertain instant, until—she refused his challenge and he was saved. The way Ellen turned away deliberately as if he weren't there made one or two of his comrades, who remembered the slap, chuckle loudly.

But for Jeck in that instant the shadow was lifted from the whole world. Quite involuntarily he laughed. The world was charged with sunlight, crammed with assurance. As he caught a glimpse of the dark flush on Ellen's brow, he stooped to keep himself from laughing too loudly.

Remarkable that so little a thing could produce so vast an effect! Tingling with pleasure, he ignored his father's proffered hand and swung the heavy basket straight to his own shoulders. He joked and laughed with his little brother as he strode home, so like a young sea-god that those meeting him smiled without knowing it before they spoke.

Later, the meaning of it came to him in words: "I've got her now!" So sure was his triumph that vindictiveness hardly salted it. Actually, of course, he meant that he was free of her. He had got her where he could bait her—and laugh.

Utterly delightful was the feeling of freedom this gave him. To treat her in the same way again, a second time, any time he liked—it was enough to urge him on to create the chance, to provide the provocation. And one night at a social gathering,

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followed by the usual dance, he was positively presented with chances. As he headed into them, his seamanship was inspired. His cunning was a sheer delight to him. A few of them had clubbed together for a bottle of whisky. They had had a round by the high dark church wall and returned to elbow their way breezily through the young crowd at the door, their breath upon the air.

"Phew!" said a mouth blowing the whisky smell away.

"What are you phewing at?" demanded Jeck, tousling the young hair. This attention from the sea-god was such sweet flattery that the schoolboy wriggled and squared up to fight. But the young men were already glancing over the young women.

"There's Janet," said Jeck, "the belle of the ball." As he began making for her through the crush, he roughly if inadvertently shouldered a girl out of the way and turned round to say he was sorry. But it was Ellen, and his smile flashed. "Hello, Ellen!" His hand actually came up and saluted her cheerily as he passed.

Janet was a lovely dancer, fluent as a wave of the sea. He told her so. His breast was filled with pleasure and his tongue with cunning. She told him that she smelt whisky off him and that he should be ashamed of himself. Solemnly he squeezed the breath out of her. "They'll see you!" "Not they—for I'll wait until we're turning—like this," and he squeezed her again. All with an air of calm assurance, lit, however, with an entrancing excitement. She saw it in his eyes. She was very handsome. In the black shadow of the church wall he kissed her. She put her arms round his neck, but would not stay long with him after that.

In this way he regained complete control of himself, and if Ellen occupied his thoughts almost incessantly it was really only with the joy of having overcome her. He did not mind her being in his head at all, because he could always stand and look at her, and watch her, angered, turn away. All he had to make sure of was that nobody was watching him when he smiled to himself.

It was a grand game. A game for the gods! And when he remembered that the gods were supposed to be jealous of any mortal who aspired to their state, he laughed. When the sea-gods rose against him, he broke their backs with the keel of his boat. Ellen could not fight because it would be against her dignity. Could anything be more perfect, more crammed with fun?

The gods had a look at Ellen. Behind her dark eyes, under her dark hair, lay the round dark pool of her being. It was easy to trouble it, where it lay, invisible.

"Hello, Ellen!"

She ignored him. He was transported.

Easy to set a swirl in the pool with a forefinger, a swirl like an adder's tail. "Hello, Ellen!"

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This time she looked at him with an odd troubled light in her eyes. It half measured, half mocked him, with something else in it that he instantly feared, then it turned away.

But he wasn't having any of that. Keep her down instantly and at all costs. He laughed. She paid no more attention to him.

He saw through her dodge, of course, and this gave him an extra delight, but now the sort of delight that had in it the premonition of a temperature, a fever. When alone, he did not voluntarily recall her; quite involuntarily her eyes looked at him with their mysterious troubled mockery and, while he was trying to fathom them, withdrew.

He began to fear that, as she gained confidence, her power would grow. So counter it he must, without evasion, hitting out at every opportunity. But now a strange self treachery began to invade him. In this new strife he found he had to resort in thought, in imagination, to violence to overcome her, and the violence consisted in crushing her bodily, crushing down on her mouth, until she collapsed into complete subjection. But the imaginative triumph always left his heart beating painfully and his legs unsteady. The mad fever taking possession of him over shadows!

Damnation to that!

So when the evening came that she did not withdraw her look, he faced into her with all his laughing strength.

"Hello, where are you bound for?"

"Why?" A slow watching satire steadied in her smile.

"Oh, nothing! Nothing at all!"

"Why worry, then?"

"I'm not worrying. I was only asking."

"I see."

"Don't be so unfriendly about it."

"Unfriendly?"

"Yes," he said, nodding brightly and smiling all around. Her satire he found positively invigorating, its hidden cause being so intimately known to him.

Then quite suddenly she laughed, a soft delicious chuckle. His startled brows flew together. The flush burned up into his face. The sensation of going to bits attacked him. Fiercely he strove to keep control. His features stiffened in an idiotic grin. She observed them, standing mercilessly still.

"Huh," he remarked. "Hmh."

"Hee-hee," she replied quite solemnly.

He glanced at her in a sudden blind wrath. Her seductive smile withered into contempt. Then she turned and left him.

His breathing was tumultuous as he watched her make along

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the rockhead path. Instinctively he glanced around to see if his folly had been observed. Apparently not. They had happened on each other in the first grassy dip beyond the houses.

His anger goaded him to follow her, to slay her—to crush her anyway. To crush her, crush her, and the worse she liked it the better. Cunningly he spied about him. Not a soul in this first dusk of evening. It was suppertime.

Nimbly he set off after her, climbing cautiously to each grassy ridge, before slipping over, and down, and up again to the next one, for the green slope above the cliffs went on in a continuous corrugation. She must not know he was following her. Were she suddenly to turn back on the path and look down at him, humiliation would crush him utterly. But if he surprised her, surprised her all alone and far enough from the houses to be completely at his mercy, then she could fight as she liked, look how she liked, she was done for. His anger flushed hotly with a new feeling that made him glance about.

Very warily he stalked her, without sound. When at last she had disappeared, he knew that she must have slipped down into the grassy dip beyond the next ridge. All he had got to do now was to reach that ridge, peer over, and then . . .

His legs began to tremble. The treachery of shyness took possession of him. He stood still. What could she be doing? Supposing she looked back over the crest at this moment and saw him? . . . Going to bits again! He was harshly, bitterly ashamed of himself; a subject for laughter that would shame him to death. Found following a girl, spying on her . . .

His swift-searching eyes followed the grassy crest down to the cliff verge. The verge itself was weathered into rock layers, rottenish yellow in colour, but broad enough for his body. These bluffs often took on fantastic shapes. The one he was staring at had a lip beneath a nose. If he crawled on to the lip, the nose would hide him. He might then peer up into the next grassy hollow and see what he would see. After that, he would be in a proper position to go into action.

He found it required a careful wriggle to get his chest off the thin turf and on to the lip of rock. In this passage he actually scraped fine flecks of stone off the lip. Though now he saw that it was a tongue rather than a lip, and that the rock which curved immediately over him was the roof of a mouth rather than a nose. This tongue which he now lay on from chest to thigh was separated by a hand's breadth from the solid rock beneath. To slide off the tongue was to fall about a yard on to a final bluff, like a small chin—beyond which there was a sheer drop of two hundred feet to jagged skerries on which at high tide the seas frothed.

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Jeck had such a perfect head for heights that his present position introduced no more than the slightest touch of peril needed to ease his mind. Along with this kind of ease, as always, came the beginning of exhilaration. Then he saw Ellen.

She was sitting in the hollow, just below the path, staring out to sea. Her face was paler than usual and quite expressionless. There were always wind eddies on these cliff heads, and now one of them struck her face and threw a tail of hair over her left temple. She never moved. He could see her perfectly, so clearly indeed that he began to feel the pallor on her face. The faint first smother of dusk may merely have emphasized the pallor. All the same it made him uncomfortable. There was hardly any need for her face to look drained as if she had some hidden sorrow! His heart began beating a bit. What on earth was she sitting there like that for? And even while he stared, her head drooped to her knees and the hand that had been on her lap fell over on to the turf.

His eyes were now so wide that when a sudden wind eddy buffeted them they watered. He wiped them with his knuckles. So queer a tumult beset him that he quite forgot where he was and levered himself upwards with such violence that his back hit the arched roof which promptly and heavily thrust him back on the tongue. The thrust was too much for the tongue, which broke with a dull rotten thud at the root and canted over upon the rock an arm's breadth beneath. Had the tongue broken of itself there would just have been sufficient incline for it to slip slowly over the cliff. As it was, his left fist got an instant hold beyond the tongue; toes, fingers and knees gripped and pressed; his whole body became a living bar, and so for the moment the broken tongue was kept from sliding over.

The commotion, his own sharp exclamation, caught the girl's attention, for his head was now just visible to her. She got to her feet. He lifted his face from the rock with slow care. It was suffused with dark red blood and smiled sheepishly.

At once she turned away and went up and out of sight.

He knew he was done for. Whenever his tension relaxed the tongue of rock would slide away with him. He could not have crawled forward even if the tongue had been intact, because just beyond it there had been a small landslide, and in any case it was sheer. To back out was now impossible.

This made him thoughtful, and he found himself astonished that the tongue, which must have been all of six or seven inches thick, had snapped so easily. Yet he ought to have known it might, for he had discovered often enough how shaly and rotten much of the cliff head stuff was. But he hadn't stopped to think. It seemed

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so idiotic to slide away with a bit of rotten rock, so damned stupid. Then a melting flush shot through his breast, for the rock had moved under him. Very slightly. His grip quickened fiercely. After a few moments he began to wonder if the tongue had really moved away—or bedded down.

But he could not hold like this long. He realized that if he were going to try anything at all, a swift trick or dodge, he must try it before his strength gave out. Apart from a sickish sensation, he was quite cool. Twisting his head round, he saw that the tip of the tongue lay on the brink of the cliff. A perfect piece of momentary balancing.

Ellen would be going home, very erect, with her pale hostile face. What childish nothings had brought him to this!

All the time, with instinctive cunning, his muscles had been tensing, flexing, feeling for poise, his toes behind their iron-shod toecaps seeking closely, powerfully, through the turf behind for a crack, a cranny, a hold. Then with exquisite caution his whole body released its downward pressure ever so slightly to thrust backward. The stone moved an inch.

Flattened again, he held the stone. He began to suspect that his jersey had got caught on a jagged edge of the stone. If it had, he was caught exactly like a beast in a trap.

The continued strain had now induced a slight trembling in his muscles. Under its sweat, his face went cold. An eddy of wind struck it. There was no trick or dodge beyond the thrust back. So he must try it again. But not wildly yet, not in a mad heave, for his body was solidly on the sliding rock down to the thighs. He tried. The stone moved. His jersey *was* caught. Instantly out of his throat tore the yell "Help!" Again panic yelled before he got a grip on himself. In the gulping moments of awful silence, of realization, which followed, he heard Ellen's voice calling him by name from above, sharply, urgently.

His muscles stretched to racking point, he lowered his brows to the stone, breathing heavily. She was coming down behind him, crying his name. "Jeck?" A hand touched his boot. "Jeck!"

"Go back!" he cried. "The stone's broken under me. Go back!"

"Jeck!"

He realized her danger. If she clutched his boot, she would be jerked over. He yelled to her to go back. She was in danger already. But she would not go back. Then in a great voice he cried, "Oh, Ellen!"

She answered that cry.

His strength was failing, and he spoke desperate words to her, and she saw how he was placed. But she did not obey the words. For her strong body had grown full of its own resource. Her

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mind did not break. She saw how the stone was going to take him. Her right hand crept up over the top of his boot, her fingers twined among the leather laces, closed in a grip that could not be broken. Her left hand dug into the grass; her body flattened itself to the earth, taut and heavy, against the coming jerk. Her fingernails broke on rock under the skin of turf, scrabbled at the rock.

His boot was moving; she heard his cry through the dark blood in her head. Her left hand, like a claw, ploughed through the shallow turf as her body was snatched to the brink; the fingers slipped into a rock crack and held; their thin bones were breaking when the jerk slackened and the weight eased. The stone had slid from under him and his hands had come against the chin of rock below, wildly for a moment until they got a purchase, an upward leverage. The stone had lacerated his cheek and blood ran into his right eye. His hands took his weight, but the left was at an awkward angle against the boss of rock. Under the renewed terrific strain his arms quivered treacherously. The stone exploded on the skerries below and gulls wheeled out crying stridently. He had to back upwards on his palms.

Suddenly he was aware of Ellen's pull on his boot, weak, but enough to keep him from toppling heels over. The darkness cleared a little, even though the blood surge in his head thickened noisily. She was holding his boot, tugging it. *Don't pull! Hold!* he cried, in the desperate silent cry meant for her inner mind. An inch or two, another; with a straighter thrust against the boss, he pushed up a whole foot. She had both his legs weighted now.

"Don't pull!" he cried, and his voice came through. He was up over the thighs. She had both his feet under her right arm and was clawing upwards. He suddenly went with her, backwards on his hands, in over the grass.

They lay side by side like children. She was bleeding from the mouth where the heel of his right boot had kicked her. She was quivering, trembling, but her smile came from the deep pool of her being, quietly up to him from the eternal well. But suddenly she gripped him, held him, gripped him more passionately, crying like a bairn.

* * *

WRONG NUMBER

A sentimental woman on a tour of the park stopped before a gigantic tree. "Oh, wonderful elm," she said, "if you could only speak, what would you say to me?"

The guide accompanying her smiled deprecatingly. "It would probably say," he suggested, "'Pardon me, madam, but I am an oak!'"

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THREE KINGS

A star embedded in the hillside, a nameless glory that shone out in the night — that was the story the shepherds told

by GEOFFREY HOUSEHOLD

HE crawled out of his sleeping bag and shivered in the Persian dawn until the sun rose in countable inches above the flat edge of the salt desert, and the temperature leaped up as if there were no atmosphere at all to soften the transition between night and day.

It was a Martian, not an earthly landscape. In such barren immensity he was conscious of his truck, his only companion, as if he were seeing it from the air. It was an indiscernible brown spot at the foot of a brown mountain. There was no green by which its shape and unity could be remarked—and this in spite of the fact that a narrow channel of water roared between truck and mountain. The stream itself was barren. Bed and banks were smooth as those of an aqueduct. The speed of the water had cleaned the rock of every obstruction where gravel might accumulate and soil grow into life.

He had intended, when he left Isfahan, to turn his back on that stream after filling his water tank, and to drive two hundred miles into the heart of the desert—an easy enough run over the baked, glistening surface, but foolhardy for a man alone. On foot and carrying water, the point of no return was fifty miles out; thus an injury, a breakdown or an unexpected patch of soft ground might well mean death from thirst or exhaustion. Two men, however, could have dealt with pretty well any emergency that was likely to befall a fifteen hundredweight truck in first class mechanical condition, with ample spares, water, petrol and wire netting in the back.

It was mere bad luck that he was alone. Aslan, his tough Turcoman servant and driver, had gone down with dysentery. And that, if you like, was a marvel, considering that Aslan, for the better part of his life, had eaten nothing that had not been tasted by fourteen thousand flies before him, and had taken no harm. But there it was. Aslan had been left, weak and cursing, in the care of a friendly village headman, and Gwynn had gone on, telling himself that he would just reconnoitre the approaches and would not risk the journey.

Laurence Gwynn was no passionate pilgrim for wealth or far

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horizons. He did not look a man likely to be alone in deserts, for he was slight and fair complexioned and by no means in his first youth. His manner, even towards his truck, had something of indecisive courtesy. This, however, was only a conscious and easy adoption of the standards of the east, and it concealed a thoroughly western honesty of purpose.

He was a consultant geologist, and he knew Persia as well as any European, and a great deal better than any native Persian. He didn't claim to love the country, but he readily admitted that it never bored him. He had reached a point of content, as in some successful *mariage de convenance*, whereat it was impossible to distinguish between love and continual interest.

Curiosity—and at that a curiosity more personal than scientific—was the motive tempting him to take the jewelled road of salt crystals which led straight into the rising sun. Yet the story of the hill and of its rocks that gleamed in darkness was nothing but a bazaar rumour. So, at least, Gwynn told himself—repeatedly—as he tried to ensure the victory of caution over curiosity. Bazaar rumours flared up with the speed of epidemics. The scrap of knowledge was always present, like the typhus, but nobody bothered to recollect or to express it. Then, one noon under the arches, a whole street would discuss some fact that was perfectly familiar to their fathers, and embroider it with lies until, instead of truth with no publicity, they had publicity with no truth.

A certain East European power had however taken the rumour seriously, and despatched, with what they hoped was secrecy, an old fashioned expedition. They were right, of course, to use horse transport. You couldn't report on possible routes and water supplies and geology from a plane. Gwynn considered this sudden excitement quite absurd. It confirmed, however, his own opinion that there was enough truth in the story to give an object—and no more—for a couple of weeks of pleasurable exploration.

The gap between horizon and red sun grew to a hand's breadth, and the stab of warmth, instant and relentless, was as keenly appreciable as had been, ten minutes earlier, the bitter cold of dawn. Gwynn's commonsense triumphed without more ado. It was folly to go on. There was no point in adding to the loneliness of that lonely desert.

He let down his canvas bucket into the river, and washed and breakfasted. The taste of fruit, coffee and fried bacon reminded him that he was out for his pleasure, and that danger was not at all a necessary spice. He stowed his gear, and followed the river up its valley along a track worn by the hooves of herds and pack animals that had come down to the edge of the desert and moved along it until they could strike northwards again into the hills.

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Some ten miles up the ravine, the mountains drew away from the river, and rock and dust changed into soil. There were crops and a village. There were even trees—a line of slender poplars by the water and apricots in the terraced plots around the houses. It was a harsh, windswept, isolated site for human habitation, but its people, for Persian villagers, were by no means poor. They lived at a forbidding distance from government and the tax gatherer.

Laurence Gwynn perceived at once, by the slight constraint that greeted his arrival, that there must be another stranger in the village. When he came to the open space of beaten earth by the village watering-place, the elders were flurried as some hostess greeting a visitor of unexpected distinction at her own quiet party. They instantly surrounded his truck, revealing, though not isolating, the former centre of attraction.

On the communal bench, beneath the scanty line of poplars, sat a negro. He was wearing a dented but carefully polished helmet which had once belonged to a trooper of the Horse Guards. His body, dressed in the remnants of European clothes, was slung about with oddments—a water bottle, an old mess tin, a primus stove, a cluster of small and dirty jute bags, and a pair of shining cymbals. His gigantic, black, boat-like feet were bare, and the heels protruded so far aft that his shin seemed to be stepped into his foot at about the position of a mizzen mast.

"Good morning, boss!" he remarked with a deep assured voice.

"Good-lord-good-morning!" answered Gwynn in a single breath of surprise.

The negro rose, clashed his cymbals and broke into a shuffling dance that suggested the sinister spasms of a witch doctor. The villagers drew back in horrified curiosity. Gwynn watched with an interest that, at first, was by no means patronizing. It then occurred to him—and he admitted disappointment—that he could put on the act just as well himself. These capers were pure fake—evidently a successful fake, for the negro must have received a night's lodging and, to judge by the empty bowls on the bench, a breakfast of bread and beans.

"You do pretty well out of it," said Gwynn.

"If," answered the negro, pointing to the remains of the stomach cheating beans, "you call this well."

He leaped, clattering, up and down as if to counteract or perhaps emphasize, for the sake of the villagers, the effect of his calm, sane utterance in the foreign tongue. The impression, Gwynn thought, might be that of an oracle speaking with solemn lucidity between the writhings of the spirit.

"How long has the afflicted been with you?" he asked the headman.

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"He came last night. He could depart," the headman added hopefully, "with your lordship. He will make the way short with fooleries and magic since he speaks your lordship's tongue."

"He speaks Persian?"

"A little. Like a child."

"What on earth are you doing here all alone?" Gwynn asked the negro.

"Seekin' the light, oh ma lord!" he answered, merrily changing his cultured English to the dialect of the American Harlem negro.

"And when you've found it?" Gwynn invited, showing by a smile that he had caught—if he were meant to catch—the allusion to that bazaar rumour which had sent him too, though not on bare black feet, into this heart of aridity.

"A small share, boss, a small share. I assure you I don't expect to be allowed to keep very much of it for myself."

"You choose an odd way to travel."

"Oh, my dear sir—or boss, I mean—there are only two ways for an African to preserve his liberty. He can frighten you, or he can play the fool. And if he can do both at once, the world is open to him. It's a lot more fun, you know, than being a crook politician on the Gold Coast."

"Like a lift?" Gwynn asked.

It was partly interest in this sure, fantastic and obviously well educated mountebank, and partly pity for the villagers who would never get rid of the incubus until it wanted to go.

"Where to, boss?"

The question was unanswerable. There was really nowhere to leave the man unless he were driven back to the Isfahan road; and, since that was the road from which he had fooled, begged and tramped his way into the hills, presumably he didn't want to return there. Nor did Gwynn, yet.

"Did you come along the river?" he asked.

"Over the mountains."

"There's a path?"

"Just for two feet and four."

"Has it been used recently?"

"Mr. Fomin is two valleys east of here with seven ponies and three men."

This answer, so detailed, so unreserved, was what he least expected. He knew that the foreign power's expedition must be in or approaching the district, but that Fomin, a thoroughly competent geologist, should have fallen for this bazaar rumour of uranium was astonishing; he must have known very well how improbable it was that radio activity could be the cause of this luminescence—if indeed there really was any. No doubt he had received an unarguable

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order from the ambassador or one of his satellite commissars. Nothing happened in Persia that they didn't know, but, since their credulity was so immoderate, no truth was of any value.

So there they all were—Fomin with ponies, himself with a truck, and this negro on the vast leathers of his feet, all chasing a story that had filtered down from a bunch of shepherds, a wandering tribe which, for one spring in twenty years, had found enough young grass to leave their usual route by the east of the hill and pass below its western face. And they had reported—what they pleased. A star imbedded in the hillside, a nameless glory, a whole hill that shone in the night.

It wasn't the first time he had followed a rumour. There was the story of the eternal flame and its altar—persistent among the nomad tribes of Luristan, though every educated Persian laughed at it. The legend had seemed worth investigation, for, to a mining engineer, there was nothing impossible about an eternal flame in oil-bearing hills. Sure enough he had found it, and sure enough it was eternal—or at any rate old enough to possess a rough altar four thousand years old. It was of no commercial value—there wasn't a city within five hundred miles that would pay for the piping of natural gas—yet he had come again upon a mystery that was ancient before the first Zoroastrians had worshipped it.

Something of this nature—known but forgotten, interesting but valueless—was what he expected to find, certainly nothing that was worth driving Fomin into a frenzy of suspicion. He didn't want to meet the man. Fomin was too willing to change the history of the world on evidence which, if it were geological, wouldn't have sufficed him for the drilling of a wild-cat well; the mere presence of Gwynn would send him rushing back to Tehran with stories of imperialist plots. Well, with luck, a meeting might be avoided. By batting straight across the desert he could reach the hill, be back at the river and away to Isfahan while Fomin and his ponies were still toiling down their valley to the edge of the salt.

"Can you drive a truck?" he asked the negro.

"No, boss. But I could mighty near lift it."

That honest answer clinched the deal. There was, of course, risk in lying out in the desert with a helmeted and cymballed eccentric, but Gwynn rejected it; unhesitatingly he placed his man in that class of pilgrims who, before the war, could be found in Persia or on any of the walkable routes round the world, selling picture postcards as a means of subsistence.

"Jump in!" he said.

The negro settled his helmet, and saluted the assembled villagers with an impressive upward thrust of the arm that suggested the lord of Africa dismissing his black and blood stained legions.

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He followed this dignified gesture by a fair attempt at all the Persian politenesses of leave-taking. The villagers evidently felt that he had been well worth the price of admission.

It was midday when Gwynn and his companion reached his solitary camp of the previous night. There, under the shade of the truck's canvas cover, they drank and forced themselves to eat a little —even the negro's appetite failed in such an oven—and drove out into the desert on a compass course.

The route of the wandering shepherds was by no means a certainty; and the map, such as it was, depended on a mid-nineteenth century survey by the Government of India. That name at the head of the sheet assumed an imposing enough authority, but Gwynn knew well that the accuracy of the map depended on nothing but the lonely integrity of a young Englishman and his Punjabi assistant, both of whom, on a subsequent journey, had died of thirst.

Still, there were only two hills the shepherds could have passed. One was at the end of a narrow peninsula of broken rocks that ran far out into the desert; the other, a mere isolated hillock, was twenty miles beyond it—at any rate, according to the triangulation of those brown and white hands, sweating, unsteady, and long since mummified.

The truck made fifty miles of easting with as little effort as if it had been running on tarmac. Only the high and trailing cloud of grey dust behind showed that the surface was fryable. To the north, curving to meet the Hindu Kush, was the line of yellow mountains where Fomin was waiting in one of the folds for the heat of the day to pass, or perhaps debouching on to the plain with full water skins gently compressing the ribs of the ponies. To the south was nothing until a man came to the old caravan route to India; and that was so nearly nothing that he might cross without noticing it.

Conversation was easy on so smooth a ride. The negro, feeling himself to be trusted, relaxed into simplicity. He introduced himself as John Mahene, B.A., of London University, and without profession. He didn't think much of the opportunities of West Africa. He was the grandson of a king, he said, and he would gladly serve a king, but not a bunch of schoolmasters—and that was what they were, those colonial officials: kindly schoolmasters.

"Boss," he asked, "how would you like to spend your life as a head prefect?"

"The name is Gwynn," Laurence reminded him.

"Well, Mr. Gwynn, I didn't. I don't want to learn democracy. The rule of the strongest, that's what suits me. Not of the smartest. No, sir!"

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As soldier, docker, tramp and circus performer he had travelled the world. He had worked as a labourer for a team of oil drillers in eastern Arabia, where his magnificent physique had attracted the admiration of a local sheikh. Mahene had then gone back a century or two in time. He became the picturesque bodyguard of tradition, inspiring terror in the disaffected by the ripple of his black muscles and the weight of his scimitar.

"They took you seriously?" Laurence asked.

"Boss—Mr. Gwynn, I mean—they surely did. Suppose you've got a gun and I've got a sword. Well, a little hole is all you've got time to make, and if you don't put that little hole in the right place, I'm going to separate a piece of you that you can't do without."

His employer, travelling in state, had taken him on a visit to Persia. There John Mahene, feeling in need of rest and comparatively western ways, had attached himself as porter and privileged clown to the local consul. He was well fed but unpaid, he said, and so this bazaar rumour . . .

"And what do you expect to find?" Gwynn asked, turning in the driving seat and regarding his companion with tolerant amusement.

"If a man doesn't get in on the ground floor," Mahene answered, "he won't find anything."

"It's not uranium, you know."

"Mr. Gwynn, if the chance is good enough for some I could mention, it's good enough for me."

"Well, if you were a geologist, it wouldn't be. How did you guess that I was after the shining light, by the way?"

"What else could you be after? There's nothing to hunt and nothing to dig up."

In the late afternoon they came to a low reef of rock jutting out into the desert. Nowhere did it seem to be more than three hundred yards in width, but their even course to the east was checked as absolutely as if the truck had been a motor launch. Gwynn turned south to find and circumnavigate the end of the peninsula; it took him a good hour to reach the point where the rock dived beneath the desert. There, with the sun now behind him and the grey, forbidding flats ahead, he had to decide whether to close in again towards the mountains, or to stay far out—keeping, as it were, his sea-room, and possibly missing the landfall he wanted. The map, naturally enough, ignored these long reefs across his course. Its makers, never dreaming of wheels in the desert, had not considered conditions of surface.

He compromised, and gradually closed in towards the main range on a north easterly course. Another reef, no higher than a man but impassable, provided a gap. He took it, and was led into

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more trouble. The only sensible move was to run back through the gap, camp there, and take to the open desert at first light. He reckoned that he could still find the hill and return, without ever embarrassing Fomin by a trace of his presence.

John Mahene proved himself a useful man in camp. He took Aslan's gear and duties, and, unlike Aslan, stripped and washed himself from head to foot in a basin of water—a desert luxury permitted by the sixteen gallon tank in the back of the truck. He spread out his filthy clothes on the ground, and dressed himself for dinner in a blanket.

He had evidently decided that the relationship was to be one of master and man. Laurence Gwynn, however, preferred partnership, for he disliked to give orders when he did not know whether they would be obeyed, or even why they should be. It seemed to him more courteous and less embarrassing to the expedition to uphold Mahene in the position of fellow and equal to which his education entitled him. He had lived long enough in Moslem countries for this attitude to be entirely natural. To him, as to the good Mohammedan, colour was a mere accident and breeding the whole world.

To emphasize the desired relationship he gave Mahene a whisky and water while he himself symbolically opened tins. Mahene caught what he was up to, and accepted the drink with a broad grin in which were neither insolence nor exaggerated gratitude, but plain, friendly intelligence. Gwynn found himself suddenly enjoying his companion. When the helmet and cymbals were put aside, this negro was worthy to be the grandson of a king.

They made ready for an early start and settled down, Gwynn in his sleeping bag, Mahene rolled in Aslan's blankets. They slept at some distance from the truck—for there seemed no need to keep watch—in a cove of the reef where the wind had piled a beach of soft grey dust. The utter silence, the absolute surety that the oxygen of the desert was theirs and theirs alone to breathe gave the two travellers a sounder rest than man in the open is permitted by his sub-conscious guardian to enjoy. That guardian had no creep of insect or flutter of grass to hold him ready to wake the sleeper. There was not even nourishment for snakes. Nothing ventured out so far into the salt but the leaping, fast travelling caravans of the gazelle.

Twice Gwynn thought he heard a stirring in the empty desert. He paid no attention. It seemed to be one of those sounds that the country Persians ascribed to jinn. For them—and not for them alone—the conception of a noisy mineral was hard to assimilate. To Gwynn, however, the crackle and purr and ever singing of

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inorganic matter subjected to extreme changes of temperature was perfectly familiar. He was no unreasoning sceptic and wouldn't have denied the possibility of a spirit life upon the otherwise lifeless salt, but all such manifestations as had come his way could be—though sometimes with difficulty—explained by the cooling and contraction of minerals.

On this occasion he put too much trust in the vagaries of inorganic chemistry. The visitor had been organic, decidedly organic. It had worn good solid jack boots. It had opened the cock of the sixteen gallon tank, buried the end of the piping in the ground so that the drip of water could not be heard, and then—as was clear from its tracks in daylight—walked a couple of miles back to its pony.

John Mahene was up first, and discovered the disaster. At his shout Gwynn ran to the truck. The negro was standing by the tail board with a dignity that even for him was unusual. He almost stood to attention. That he expected to be blamed was obvious. He had, after all, somewhat overdone his eccentricities in the village, and the incalculable white man might fairly think him mad or a murderer.

The thought, however, never occurred to Gwynn. He didn't even waste time in curses.

"We had better get back to the river before the heat," he said.

There was a canvas *chatti* of water hanging by the driving seat, which the raider had missed. It held about three quarts, enough for drinking and the radiator—which under that sun and in anything but top gear could be nearly as thirsty as a man. The run back to the river alongside their own tracks could not take more than three or four hours.

They loaded kit and supplies. The engine started with two devastating back fires and stopped. The self starter was so dead that it seemed an indecency to pull it a second time. Gwynn opened the bonnet. One cylinder head was cracked, and in another the plug was loose. To a miner the smell of the fumes was unmistakable. The visitor had unscrewed a couple of plugs, dropped in two detonators and replaced the plugs.

"The miserable, miserable fool!" Gwynn muttered. "What harm did he think I could do?"

His exasperation with the jack booted one's unnecessary cruelty met with no response from John Mahene.

"He sure made certain that you couldn't do any," the negro answered, as a man of action defending another man of action.

The hard ground held little trace. It was the merest luck that half a mile away they found the tracks of a single man ploughing through a bed of windblown detritus such as that on which they had

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slept. From the reef above it Gwynn picked out with his glasses a pile of droppings and a roughening of the baked surface where the close hobbled pony had awaited the return of its rider.

"How the devil could he know where we were?" Mahene exclaimed.

"Dust. The dust behind the truck. You could see that cloud twenty miles away. And if he were watching from the mountains—well, he'd only to follow the right reef to come to us. It's my fault. I came in too close. But I never dreamed of this."

"Where he is, there's water," said Mahene.

"Not necessarily. He's probably carrying enough to get there and back, as we were. I wouldn't bet on there being any water at all in the southern valleys."

They looked at the great folds of the mountains, which changed from magenta to copper to yellow in the furnace of the risen sun.

"There's nothing for it but to march back to the river in a couple of nights," Gwynn went on. "We'll cut across the bad ground and pick up the tyre tracks on the other side. Then it's only sixty miles with a good gallon between us if we empty the radiator. Lying up by day will be the worst. It's pretty bad without shade, you know."

"You're the boss, Mr. Gwynn," Mahene agreed. "Still, I'd just like to catch *him* asleep."

"You haven't got a pony."

They returned to the truck and breakfasted. They had no need to start on the precious *chatti* of water until the march. There were tins of fruit which would be awkward to carry, but provided enough liquid for the day.

Mahene prowled impatiently between the truck and a flat topped crag, from which the lower slopes of the mountains could be watched. He did not easily accept defeat. Pride, Gwynn thought, was perhaps the essence of his character. Only a man whose sense of his own worth was unshakable could allow himself, quite calmly, such buffooneries.

"They won't march till five in the afternoon," Gwynn assured him. "Lie down and rest."

Mahene controlled himself till four. Then he settled on top of the crag with Gwynn's powerful binoculars and a doubled blanket to lie on—for even his black skin was instantly blistered by the rock.

Gwynn squatted in the patch of shade that was beginning to grow on the northern side. At five he asked:

"What's the good, Mahene?"

"Give me another hour, Mr. Gwynn. That won't make any difference to us. I hate to let him get away with it."

Mahene had his reward. When the rays of the sun had lengthened

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from heat that would fry to the heat of a slow oven, he called out. Gwynn joined him on the rock. There were seven small specks moving diagonally down the slope where once the delta of a river had dropped into the prehistoric sea whose salt was all about them.

"What's the distance, Mr. Gwynn?"

"Fifteen miles, more or less."

"What sort of men has Fomin?"

"All communists from Azerbaijan. But desert worthy."

"I watched their camp one evening," said Mahene. "I was far above them, but I could see they didn't pray."

"Quite likely. I don't suppose they are practising Mohammedans any longer. There is no God, and Anarchy is his prophet."

"Mr. Gwynn, if I had a pony with water, would you go on?"

"No."

"Can we wait here another day if we have to?"

"No."

"Will you wait half an hour for me at the foot of this rock?"

"Yes, Mahene. But what's the good?"

The sincerity and keenness of the man were pathetic. Gwynn's answer was just to humour a child, a child who might very well be dead in forty eight hours. Then, when the negro had gone, he said to himself: *O my God, he's taken the chatti and cleared out.*

It was hard to sit there and trust his own judgment of character. He comforted himself with the thought that, after all, there was nothing else, never had been anything else he could trust. He couldn't fight Mahene, or even catch him.

The shadow of the crag was very long. By watching closely he could see it crawl from pebble to pebble like a rising tide. To his tired eyes the lifeless desert was a world sharp and uncoloured as a photograph. Then the singing began. It was a little tune of great sweetness in no human voice, and there was no telling where it came from. His whole body tingled. For three seconds he felt that this was a symptom of death, commanding panic and worship together. In the next second he knew, and sprang up to face the rock.

Over the top of it appeared a black face, streaked with white paint. The white hair from a horseguard's helmet was stuck to the sides of the mouth, forming a nightmare moustache. The mouth contained a remarkable set of tin teeth, two of which hung down outside the lips like the fangs of a leopard. There was little doubt what the effect would be on an Azerbaijan driver in the dead of night, with no faith in the Prophet to protect him.

"How on earth did you make that noise, Mahene?" he asked.

The negro produced it. At close quarters there was no mystery at all. It was a soprano hum, of singular, reedy clarity, warbled through the nose with mouth closed. It still seemed to pervade the

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whole atmosphere, to be as directionless as distant bird song.

Mahene removed his tin teeth and grinned.

"Think it will work?"

"If they aren't still more afraid of Fomin," Gwynn answered. "But, my dear man, how are you going to reach them?"

"Run."

"And find their camp?"

"I reckoned you could tell me how to do that, Mr. Gwynn."

John Mahene slithered down the rock and joined his companion in the shade. He was stark naked, and painted down to the navel with fine white lines. Lower markings were more solid and of great complexity. It was hard to tell what the effect would be against a background of pitch black shadow, but certainly that of a tenuous, indefinite horror growing out of a base of terrifying indecency.

"One of my aids to travel," said Mahene apologetically. "The paint is luminous. And why not, Mr. Gwynn? Didn't you like a ride on a ghost train yourself when you were the age of a Persian villager?"

With this extraordinary figure squatting by his side and eagerly unfolding the map, Gwynn was overcome by a sense of unreality. Not only was he, Laurence, at last and as a fact in that desert disaster where imagination had often placed him, but he was accompanied by a black man—a friendly and on the whole delightful black man with a horsehair moustache and tin teeth. Though never more sober, he felt that lifting of the spirit, that willing surrender to fantasy with which a drunken man accepts the unfamiliar.

"We are about here," he said, placing a tiny pencil cross in a blank space of the map. "We know where Fomin is now—" and he put another cross on the last hatchings of high ground. "We know where he is going, and that there is every reason why he should march on the shortest line. He'll stop, at the latest, when the moon sets, and perhaps an hour or two earlier. He'll pass within about twelve miles of us, and he'll camp along this straight line from twenty to thirty miles away from us."

Then he pulled himself together.

"Mahene, this is lunacy. If you aren't killed, you'll be lost in the desert. I can't allow it."

"That's understood, Mr. Gwynn. But you can't stop it. Now, if you like to start back, I'll come after you with any ponies and water I can get. And if you like to wait—well, I don't look much like the Managing Director of Consolidated Persians without my trousers. But I'm near enough not to want to turn back."

Gwynn pressed him to take half the contents of the *chatti*. He would not. Fomin's water was what he wanted, and if he failed to get it, he would return, he said, by morning. No, he couldn't get

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lost any more than Fomin had. The reefs running out at right angles to the main range were as good as a compass.

John Mahene loped away over the desert, with an hour of twilight ahead of him which would merge into the stranger but even clearer light of a waning moon. Naked, long legged and steady paced, Gwynn saw him go, and thought that for him as for the gazelle the salt flats might be ally rather than enemy. To a build and stride like his, forty miles in a night were no impossibility.

Gwynn returned to the truck. He ate a little, and poured out a fair and careful ration of water. With dusk and in the absence of any companion, he was full of melancholy foreboding. He wished to heaven that he had not lent himself to Mahene's fantastic confidence. The negro's damn fool scheme had brought death a good deal nearer than it need have been. He had no doubt that the immediate result would be startling, but afterwards ? Mahene would either be shot by Fomin, or lose his way. Gwynn saw himself wandering hopelessly over the salt with the last of the water to find nothing but a body.

He rested, not daring to sleep too heavily. Before dawn he heard the rumble of hooves, and rolled out of his bag with the shot gun that he used in kinder country to supply the pot. He never carried any other weapon.

Mahene's voice hailed him. He blinked at the formless thing above the salt, dimly perceived to be riding one pony and leading a second. In the semi-darkness there were no legs to be seen. It appeared to be a sort of loathsome idol balanced upon the saddle by supernatural attraction.

It let loose a deep scream of laughter, easily recognizable as the very human release of nervous tension.

" Got here, boss ! Three ponies and all the water and Fomin, boss ! That's what we have. The three drivers bolted—oh, my lord, like a donkey race ! Slashed the halters and off they went. Bareback. One man on each of them and a loose horse. They won't stop till it's too far to come back. And then a nice walk with pony blood to drink. That'll teach 'em not to believe their eyes, Mr. Gwynn. Ya-ha ! Ya-ha ! Ya-ha ! "

" And Fomin ? "

" Ran after 'em, shouting. He gave it up pretty soon. And when he came back to his tent, I sort of uncoiled myself from the pile of blankets. He's a brave man, Mr. Fomin—but he did spend a second wondering just what the target was. And that was one second too long."

" He's all right ? " Gwynn asked, dreading the answer.

" Sure ! I tied him up tight and left him in the open. It won't do him any harm to lie in the sun a while and wonder if I'm coming back."

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"I'll have to let him go after his men, you know. He'd better take two ponies and a water skin, and clear out."

"It's my breakfast I was thinking of," John Mahene replied.

Gwynn suddenly laughed as unrestrainedly as the negro.

"For God's sake clean yourself up while I get it," he said. "I take it we haven't got to worry about water any more?"

There was enough for coffee and the journey, but not for a wash. Mahene rubbed his skin with petrol and fine dust, and then resumed his clothes. After a full day spread out in the sun, the seams were empty of life as if they had passed through a delousing oven.

They packed such extra food as could easily be carried, and mounted. Gwynn found a holster and pistol strapped to his saddle.

"You keep that," said Mahene.

Lawrence Gwynn shook his head, and pitched the holster into his derelict truck.

"Fomin might get it back," he replied. "We'll sleep sounder without it. And we're two to one anyway."

At ten o'clock they reached Fomin's camp. It looked like a huddle of gypsy rags upon the desert. Three ponies were trampling the remains of the matting that had been stretched over them in readiness for the heat of the day. Fomin's tent had been hurled upwards and collapsed by the struggle beneath it. The drivers' blankets were scattered over the salt. Cooking pots and saddlery showed every sign of a stampede of terrified men and horses. Fomin, shapeless as another water skin, lay on his side with his wrists tied behind his back and his ankles lashed together.

Gwynn untied the ropes, and supported Fomin while the painful blood flowed back along his arteries. He had met the man at several diplomatic parties in Teheran, and had even exchanged publications with him; yet he recognized, with a shade of surprise, that the present bond of attempted murder which lay between him and this very angry man was a deal more natural than the heartiness with which they had clinked their glasses of vermouth and vodka.

He had never felt, as with a colleague of any other nationality, that their interest in the common science could overcome their political allegiance. Fomin had remained far more of an impenetrable Asiatic, in spite of his fair and handsome features and his excellent English, than the dark, stag eyed Persians whom he loved and understood.

"You might at least have left us water," said Gwynn, as conversationally as he could manage.

"Why should I?"

"Well—let us say, as one prospecting geologist to another."

"What has the profession to do with it?" Fomin stormed.

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"I tell you this shall be settled at a higher level between our two countries."

"Will it? It's just your word against mine—and that won't make a diplomatic incident."

"My men will report straight to the Embassy."

"And say that they saw a ghost and left you to die? They won't, my dear Fomin. They are Persians first, and Communists after. They'll take the easiest way out and just disappear. And if Mahene and I don't talk, it will simply be assumed they murdered you."

John Mahene returned from picketing and watering the ponies. He showed as little resentment as Gwynn, and contented himself with a grin and an exhibition of shadow boxing, as if inviting Fomin to join in the memory of a violent but amusing experience.

His clowning was the last straw. Fomin passed in one beautiful blaze of emotion from anger to martyrdom. He liked to strike an attitude, even when he was sincere. He had been told so often by heroic comrades that his face was noble—as indeed it was.

"Kill me then, you and your hired slave! I don't need hypocrisy."

Gwynn obediently withdrew his supporting arm, and Fomin dropped to the ground in an undignified bundle.

"What shall we do with him for the day, Mahene?" he asked.

"Shove him in his tent, Mr. Gwynn, and encourage him to have some sleep. See here, commissar . . ."

"I have already told you I am not a commissar," Fomin interrupted.

"Being translated—boss," said Mahene. "And you listen to me! If you stick your head outside the flies of that tent, I'm going to bat it straight back again."

Fomin gave no trouble. He seemed to have the acceptance of the Asiatic in face of violence. Or was it, Gwynn wondered, that the long and illogical party training helped a man to recognize the occasions when revolt was hopeless?

Mahene slept through the day, while Gwynn kept watch on the silent tent. Horses and men sweated under the mat awnings. There was nothing to do, but to endure heat without movement; that itself was an occupation.

When the sun was low, they called to Fomin. Pacified by deep draughts of cooler air as much as by food and drink, grudgingly he permitted conversation.

"When did you last water?" Gwynn asked Fomin.

"In the afternoon, the day before yesterday."

"Well or spring?"

"Mudhole."

"Yes, it tastes like it. Are you sure of the position?"

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" I am not a child."

" Then you'd better take a pony and a water skin and start now. You should reach the hole some time tomorrow night."

" I will not," said Fomin. " I shall follow you."

" Very well, if you prefer it. We are returning straight to the river."

" You are not going on ? " Fomin exclaimed, as if shocked by such a dereliction of duty.

" Good lord, no—not enough water ! You took a crazy risk, Fomin."

" I took no risk. We were all mounted and could move fast. I was going on to the spring migration track and home by it. There is a well half a march to the east of the hill. My drivers were sure."

Gwynn looked at the map. The valley by which shepherds and flocks must enter the mountains was clear enough, but there was no guessing their track across the desert. It was a reasonable assumption however, that somewhere to the east of the shining hill was water.

" Mr. Gwynn," said Mahene, " if the drivers could find it, we can find it."

" Mahene, what the devil do you think there is in this that is worth risking your life for ? "

" Money," replied John Mahene.

" And you, Fomin ? "

" My orders are to report on that hill."

" Just fear of the consequences ? " Gwynn asked.

" No. My duty to the future. But you will not understand that, imperialist ! "

" Oh, Mahene is the only imperialist—as near as we can get to it today ! All he wants is a concession. But look here, Fomin ! Speaking as one geologist to another, do you for one moment suppose that the luminescence of that hill is due to radio activity ? "

" That is not my business."

" And what happens when you come back and say : *I told you so ?* "

The dead mobility of Fomin's profile suddenly twitched into life. He replied with a proverb, speaking perfect Persian. The use of that aristocratic language seemed for a moment to relieve him of party discipline.

" Falsehood with good intentions is preferable to truth with controversy."

" You believe that ? " Gwynn asked indignantly.

" What I believe does not matter. That is what they may tell me."

" And yet you obey ! "

" For the sake of mankind, I obey."

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"Oh, hell!" said Gwynn, giving it up. "We haven't a sane motive between us for going on. Very well, let us go on! Fomin, if I promise not to tell a soul of your co-operation with the enemy, will you give me your word that you won't try to sabotage this expedition?"

Fomin struggled with himself, and then shook Gwynn's hand with extreme proletarian heartiness.

"It is wrong," he said, "and I know it. But we are always ready to be friends. Come now, a bottle! I have a bottle in my tent. We drink a bottle to the shining light."

"I think we'd better keep it till we get there," said Gwynn mildly. "Shall we start now?"

There was water enough for two full marches and the intervening day. They trudged over the salt on a compass course, walking alongside the three ponies laden with food, water, Fomin's instruments and a long strip of matting rolled round its bamboo poles. At midnight they rested and mixed some of Fomin's bottle with their water. Then, at first light, they forced the pace for a couple of hours, and camped.

The hill, their objective, was now in full view—a crouching black bulk that blotted out the sunrise. It performed no spectacle for them. It was a dead lump of minerals on a dead plain.

They waited, impatiently accepting the uneasy sleepiness of the heat, and knowing that the bodies of men and horses, in spite of idleness, were ticking away their water with the regularity of a clock. In the afternoon, earlier than was prudent, they started across the desert in order to have some light for the examination of the hill. The short daylight march exhausted men and horses, and the carefully calculated ration of water had to be increased.

On the western side the rocks were mercilessly hot, and would have been hard climbing even if bearable to the naked palm. Fomin took a pony and rode round the hill. On his return to camp an hour later, the pony died. Yet they admitted that his ruthless speed was justified. He had found a gully on the northern side up which they could climb in the shade, with a fair chance of reaching the top in daylight.

The height was only twenty feet more above the plain than the five hundred and sixty that the long dead surveyors had allowed. Even so the effort to all but the tireless Mahene was very great. There was nothing to see on the top or upper slopes but an outcrop of gneiss and signs of slight volcanic activity in the tertiary period . . . Worse still, there was no sign whatever that flocks or any living thing had ever crossed the featureless plain of salt to the east of the hill, where the track of the shepherds' regular migration should be.

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The second hill, the other possibility, was some forty miles to the south east. The surveyors, who could only have glimpsed its cone from the main range in the clear air of morning or evening, had put it too low and too near. It was far more than the hillock shown, with a question mark, on the map.

Gwynn trained his glasses on its fast fading image. Then he lay down and steadying his elbows, remained motionless for a full minute.

"Tell me what you see," he said, handing the glasses to Fomin.

"A star through a gap," Fomin pronounced, and added more hesitantly: "but—but it has size, and it is too faint."

"Let Mahene try."

From toe to lens, Mahene's recumbent body pointed to the hill with the concentrated purpose of a black gun barrel. Then he rolled over on his back, kicked, and with an acrobat's arching of the spine sprang upright.

"That's it! That's it, Mr. Gwynn! That's what we're after!"

"It might as well be in the moon," Gwynn answered.

His voice was angry, and he checked himself. A casual curiosity, just enough for what should have been a casual and uneventful trip —that had been his motive. And now that he found he couldn't reach it, he had to see that the damned phenomenon was really there, and as inexplicable to a geologist as it had been to half naked nomads.

"We know there is water beyond," said Fomin.

"We hope," Gwynn corrected him sharply.

"There's nothing much left to carry, Mr. Gwynn," Mahene suggested. "You both ride, and I'll run. I can do it. You'll see I can. How long would it take us then?"

"Six hours or so—if the ponies can stand it. But what afterwards? Only our feet and about two quarts apiece."

"For a soldier that is enough," said Fomin superbly.

Gwynn didn't ask exactly what it was enough for. The recklessness of his two companions appalled but fascinated him. He contented himself with pointing out that if they rode north east towards the mountains, they had at least a better chance of water and life. The speck of light upon that distant hill, whose outline had now vanished, made his argument seem empty even to himself.

An hour after midnight they started. The two remaining ponies were still thirsty and in doubtful condition. One carried Fomin, their food and a little grain; the other, Gwynn and two nearly empty water skins that hung down from the saddle like the slack udders of an old goat. The speed that Gwynn had estimated was impossible. In five hours they covered only twenty miles.

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Then the sun rose, and soon afterwards Fomin's pony stumbled and fell heavily.

"Shoot him," said Fomin.

"Nothing to shoot him with."

"My pistol—isn't it in your pack or his? Why not?"

"How the hell do I know why not?" Gwynn replied irritably. "I hate the things. I suppose I'd rather give my own life than take someone else's."

Mahene unroped a cooking pot. He took out his knife and laid the pot by the horse's throat.

"Pity to waste it, Mr. Gwynn," he apologized.

There was a little more water now for the last pony, and its effect was instant. He had accepted an end to weariness, but now he shied away from the blood and from Mahene, and gave trouble in the reloading.

They went on. There was no other hope but a march straight through the heat of the morning. They went on steadily. Mahene's even pace kept them from falling into the exhausted spurts and sudden halts of the dying caravan.

At midday the character of the desert changed. The salt crystals no longer waited and winked from their flat grey world. There was a scattering of black dust on the surface which gradually thickened. Soon they came to pimples and corrugations, of infinite relief to the eyes, where the wind had piled dust against the roots of vegetation that had lived for a few weeks in spring.

Gwynn scraped with his foot one of these tiny mounds, and found a dead tuft of coarse grass and a sheep dropping. He called to his companions to look. It was plain that they were crossing the route of those shepherds who, once in a generation, had found green growth and wandered by the western side of the hill, whose curious report had brought three men and a staggering pony into this desolation.

They were more cheerful for the sign of humanity. As if they themselves had been present, they chattered wildly of the vanished grass and the shallow rain pools, until pain insisted that parched tongues must be kept covered. In their imaginations, as mile after mile they weakened, this journey became a walk to the world's end, to riches, to an infinite source of proletarian power. Though two of them, at least, knew that whatever they discovered would be only a geological curiosity, worth no more than a picture postcard, they could not admit, in self protection, that such suffering was only for such an end.

The shade of the outlying rocks promised sanity as well as rest—freedom at last from the overwhelming temptation to lie down and drink. The rocks, the blessed rocks, were a far more compelling

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objective than the hill itself. That was a mere forbidding cone. There was no trace of the phenomenon of the night. On and on they dragged their feet over the dust until there was reason at last for a man to look where he was going.

The sun was still so high that there was no patch of shade large enough for them all. They drank, and then lay down, each at the foot of his own rock or in the curve of his own gully, clinging to the darkened strip that was soothing as a woman, and no wider. The pony did not look as if he were likely to rise again.

There was so little time. The last brackish quart from the skin had gone to the pony. The men had each a full water bottle left. That allowed them the evening, and only the evening, in which to climb the hill, to look eastwards from the top and to spot the migration track and its well or wells which might, with luck, lead them back alive to the mountains.

It was the hope of water rather than the secret of the hill which persuaded them at last to their feet.

The climb was steep but of no difficulty. They traversed the lower slopes and turned on to the northern face. There in the comparative coolness they rested, and breathed deeply of air that seemed to wash their lungs. They allowed themselves a cup of water apiece. It acted on their spirits as if it had been alcohol, and reminded them that for all their weariness they were still fit men. Fomin and Gwynn began to exchange their professional impressions of the hill. It had undoubtedly been formed by some volcanic upheaval in geologically recent times. The lava flow had been slight. There was no sign of any mineral of commercial value except zinc. The ore suggested that it was rich even for Persia.

After climbing some four hundred feet, they were stopped by a low, precipitous ridge which had once been the lip of a crater. Mahene settled himself on a ledge halfway up, and from his shoulders Gwynn reached the top. He looked down into a rough bowl two hundred yards across. He remained quite still. Detail, every detail, was clear, so what he saw could not be a mirage. And it was credible. A warm spring in such a place was in accordance with the laws of nature. Sulphurous, of course, it would be. Perhaps undrinkable. He fought down his ecstasy lest the resulting disappointment should be unbearable. And all the time he was conscious of Mahene's grip on his ankle.

"Anything wrong, Mr. Gwynn?"

"No. No, nothing wrong. There's water. Or I think I see it."

He pulled himself up and firmly turned his back on the deceptive paradise. He anchored one hand with sudden strength, and stretched down the other to haul up Fomin and Mahene.

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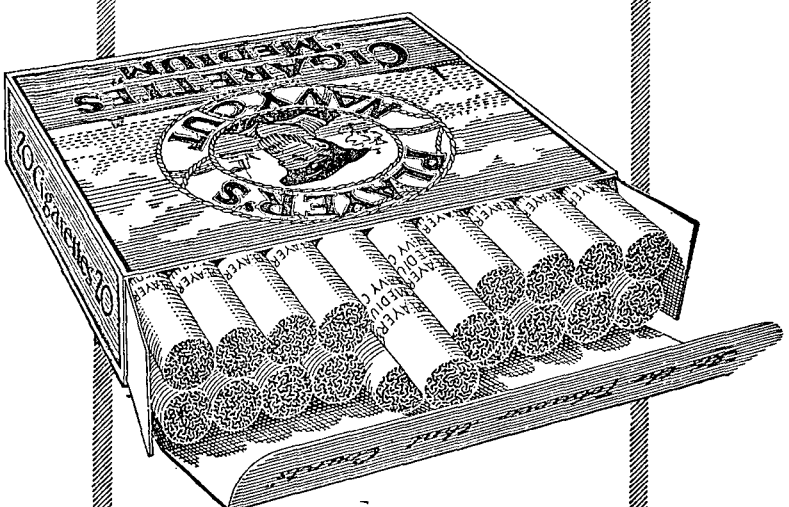
Whichever way you look at it . .



it's the tobacco that counts

Player's Please

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Below them was a shallow crater, craggy, riven, terraced, and resembling an immensely magnified rock garden. On the eastern slope was a rough pool of water, obviously artificial. Little dug channels, choked and disused, led the water across the floor of the crater. Along the ditches and in flat damp patches grew a tangle of cultivated plants that had gone wild. Wheat, maize and some kind of cabbage competed for the soil; their supply of light and water was unbounded.

Mahene rushed for the pool in great dancing strides, and plunged in. Fomin knew as well as Gwynn what to expect. With a show of unconcern, he asked:

"How—how does it taste?"

"Commissar," shouted Mahene, "it's a change from your old saddle bags. I wouldn't say better than that."

They joined Mahene in the water. It's touch was heaven to their dried skins. Its flavour was no worse than that of a spa water, and its effect was unlikely to be more than inconvenient. With the crater for a base to which, in emergency, they could return, they were free at last of time, and could find the vital homeward well at leisure.

Mahene cut a load of green stuff, and took down the three full water bottles for the pony. While he was away, Gwynn and Fomin searched for the unknown builder of the pool and channels. That he was dead or had long since departed was certain. They found his dwelling, a cool hollow in the crater wall. There was nothing in it but his bed of corn stalks, crude pots of cut lava and some packets of seeds, printed in a Slav tongue. Scratched on the wall were Slav characters, like the scrawling of child or caveman.

"Here — lived — Pyotr — the — monk — to — the — Glory — of — God," Fomin translated . . . "And a list of years beginning at 1920. And the word Glory written up everywhere again and again."

"He hadn't even any fire," Gwynn said. "He must have lived on raw grain and vegetables."

"Why not?" Fomin answered, with a touch of indignant sympathy for the unknown. "He was a hermit."

A hermit. He certainly was. To Gwynn a hermit was a historical curiosity. Fomin, however, seemed to find such fanaticism wholly natural and contemporary.

"His choice was wrong," he said. "But it was truly Slav."

He looked proudly over the crater, as if it were his duty to annexe it for something that was not altogether the union of political faiths.

Mahene returned at sunset with food and the primus stove. He reported that the pony was eating, and that it would certainly recover if they could find an easy route for it up to the water.

They started for that glowing western face which they and the

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shepherds had seen across the desert. A path, with steps roughly cut in the rock, led upwards out of the crater, then curved to the west and down. It ended abruptly in a much trampled space at the top of a cliff. They knew that they must be directly above the shining light.

Below them the side of the hill fell away in what was rather a rough glacis than a cliff. It was far too steep to climb, but a man could rest against it if he had some slight means of support. Both the man and the support—what was left of them—were visible. At the bottom, lying on a narrow platform of gravel, was a body. At the top, tied round a boulder, was the broken end of a grass rope.

Another path, very narrow and worn smooth by the ascents and descents of a single pair of feet, skirted the edge and then plunged downwards, zig-zagging across the normal slope of the hill until it led them back to the cliff's foot. The monk Pyotr lay with his hands crossed on his breast; he must have been some time a-dying after his fall. He wore the remains of his black frock tied round his waist. It had not rotted. The knots showed that this rag was all he had in life. Where his flesh had been exposed to the sun it had dried; where it was covered by his long, grey hair, it had disappeared. In the wash of the light wind the hair moved back and forth over white bone.

He held a heavy hammer in his hand. The debris upon which he lay was not gravel, but chippings from the rock face, fallen week after week and year after year during his strange, single handed quarrying. The bank of debris was two hundred feet long, proving that he had worked on the end of his rope right across the face of the rock.

Gwynn picked up a handful of the chippings. They were composed of a hard deposit left by water which had washed over the rock and dried, or even boiled, before it reached the bottom. This mineral skin the monk had cleaned away from the underlying rock.

Fomin knocked out a specimen of the rock itself.

"Zinc again," he said. "But what use did he think it was without any possible transport? Why did he want it? Did he think his God would make the railway?"

"He wanted it to make the shining light," said Gwynn.

"They did not teach chemistry in monasteries."

"No. They taught patience, Fomin. Patience till death. Patience for the Glory of God. Glory he wrote, didn't he? Oh, it's quite plain! He saw after dark the luminous patches of rock where sulphide of zinc had been exposed to the sun, and wanted more of it."

"A natural sulphide of zinc in that purity is impossible," Fomin answered shortly.

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"But there it is, my good colleague. There it is! It is also impossible that one man should clear thirty thousand square feet of it with nothing but a grass rope and a hammer. One square foot an hour. Four hours a day. Ten thousand days. That would do it, Fomin, if he came in 1920. You should be proud of your compatriot."

"But for what? For what, I ask you?"

"To light the desert."

"For aircraft?"

"For us, commissar," replied Mahene impatiently. "My lord, all that work! And how he must have hoped that someone would see it!"

A quarter of a mile to the south was a steep ridge from which they could look, at an angle, on to the face of the rock. Twilight was on them when they reached it. Faint luminous patches were visible where Pyotr had been at work and on raised surfaces where water had never run. Then the night came down and the rock began to glow with the merciless light it had received during the day.

The pattern of the monk's quarrying appeared. It was very rough, and only to be distinguished after long watching, for gullies, angles and pinnacles broke the outline. The design was intended to be a solid eight pointed star. The eighth point was incomplete,

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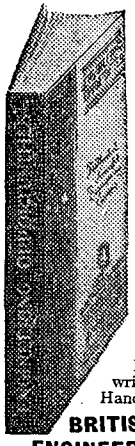

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barely started. It stood exactly above the dead body of the monk.

In the middle of the star—or so nearly the middle that Pyotr plainly had the eye of a craftsman—was a black spot which seemed to be a hollow, too deep to catch the sun during the day. A black line which was a ledge ran across the star to its centre.

They found the bottom of the ledge. That, too, had been worn into a path. It was a vile place, nowhere more than two feet wide, but the going was firm and the way could clearly be seen. The light, when they were in the midst of it, was not so powerful as it had appeared from a distance; the rock was luminous as the bow wave of a summer boat, revealing the shapes of objects without detail.

The black spot was a natural cleft, of which the outer edge had been knocked into a rough circle by Pyotr's hammer. It was quite shallow. At the back they could see a dim gleam of metal which drew a gasp of anticipation from John Mahene.

An ikon of the Virgin and Child stood upon an altar crudely chipped from the surrounding rock. The two Byzantine heads stared at the intruders from a massive frame of gold. The devotion which had inspired that indefatigable monk to rescue it from destruction or theft could be understood, but how he had carried an object of such breadth and weight and value across frontier and mountains, whether hidden in sacks or under his cassock, was beyond conjecture; nor could they guess how he had come to the hill, over the face of which, for his remaining years, he had laboured to extend the deep and golden frame of his treasure. As likely as not, Gwynn thought, he had gone up to die, and found, like themselves, a reprieve.

"Worth the journey, Fomin?" he asked.

"I will not let you take it. It stays here," Fomin answered with quiet and absolute determination.

"I was not thinking of its worth in Bond Street," said Gwynn gently.

Fomin's lack of comprehension wasn't surprising. He served his own kingdom of the spirit. So did they all, Gwynn thought, all different kingdoms, the European, the Asiatic and the Negro. They had risked their lives for such utterly distinct reasons, and God alone knew whether one was more valid than another.

Mahene's upright body was tense with reverence. He was not a man to kneel. When he felt Gwynn's eyes upon him, he found it necessary to speak.

"We shan't get rich this time, Mr. Gwynn," he said.

He did not sound disappointed, merely regretful that it was too much for any human being to expect profit as well as success.

"Not this time, John," Gwynn answered. "This time we have come with our gifts."

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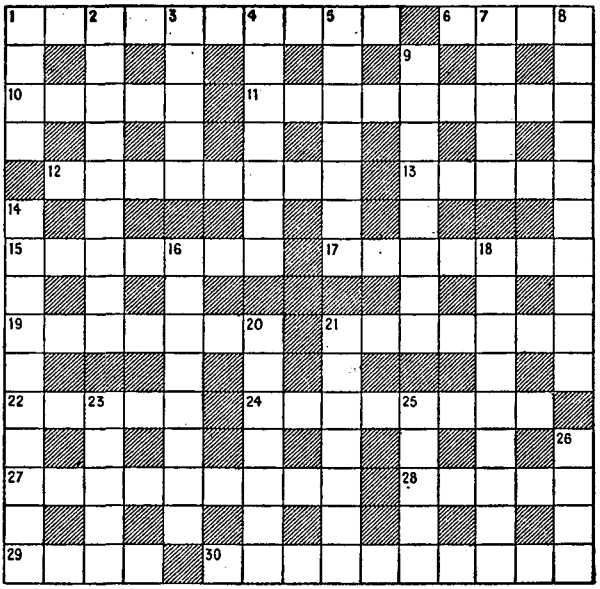
ARGOSY CROSS WORD

Solution on page 99



CLUES

Across

1 Financially in distress—or just at sea about things? (2, 3, 5).

6 One sees this when there's dripping about (4).

10 Literary egotist (5).

11 This food ain't green! (9).

12 All of it gives sugar, and its head honey (8).

13 Try ether for a change (5).

15 Does he make the chicken hot around the collar? (7).

17 The hundredth laugh is followed by an uproar (7).

19 No start, no finish (7).

21 Bucks' contribution to the table (7).

22 The bear doesn't need to grow one—there's one there already! (5).

24 Would D.D.T. touch this library pest? (8).

27 Mischievous start for a hasty move (9).

28 10 is perhaps a gap in this (5).

29 A leer for the fisherman (4).

30 Probably not you but your conscience (6, 4).

Down

1 No friend for this stone (4).

2 Commercial blow? (5, 4).

3 Half term outing (5).

4 Too dour a life for the man who wants room (7).

5 A form of energy (7).

7 Not a lower command, of course (5).

8 Putting on a show—of arms? (10).

9 Star rein (anag.) (8).

14 This wild flower should burn well (5, 5).

16 Not in the manner of the gourmet (8).

18 You can take this out for life (9).

20 From this to a ridiculous clue, and all under the tree? (7).

21 Not vile, but passionate (7).

23 The fate of this made Newton think (5).

25 Have we far to go to find food? (5).

26 "My days are in the yellow ——; The flowers and fruits of love are gone." (Lord Byron) (4).

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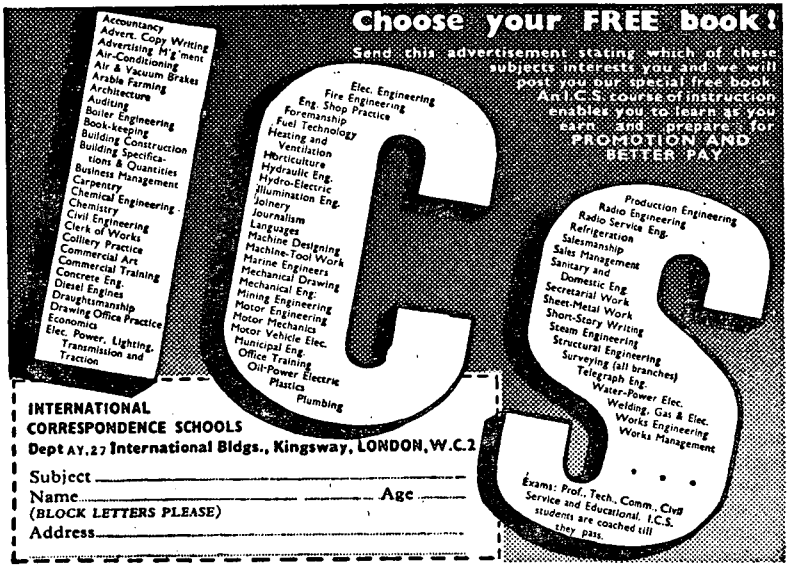

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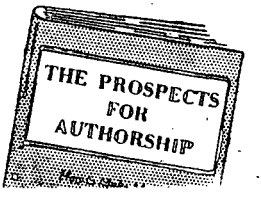

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